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ENGLISH MYSTICS

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BY

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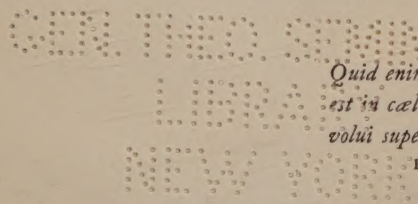

Quid enim mihi
est in cælo? et a te quid
volui super terram?

Ps. lxxii. 25 (Vulg.)

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TO

A. M. N.

AND

A. C. W. R.

PREFACE

IN the belief that not a few people are already wearying of the cult of materialism and modernity, this book has been written. When it was possible reference has been made to books and editions which are not only procurable with reasonable ease, but which, when procured, can be read with the same by ordinary folk.

I have not attempted to write an encyclopaedic handbook which should detail salient facts about every English writer in whom the most relentless searcher could detect a speck of mysticism ; but I have tried to indicate the particular qualities, the racial aroma of English Mysticism, in its different aspects, as shown by men and women of widely separated times and dissimilar temperament and environment.

Scholars may perhaps forgive popularizing efforts if they bring within the reach of a great mass of the English people things of great price which should be our common inheritance, and not the enclosed garden of a very few.

To compile an adequate history of English Mysticism would consume a lifetime's research, and demand more volumes than the

majority of people now would dream of reading.

If the book should serve to restore the idea of the mystical temper as a desirable possibility for sane and practical Englishmen, and to show that, in varying forms, it has been in every age not only a possibility but a fact, it may perhaps prove not wholly useless to a generation marked by a spirit of inquiry and unsatisfied desire.

G. E. H.

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ENGLISH MYSTICS

INTRODUCTION

READERS of Huysmans' *La Cathédrale* may remember how he apportioned the mediaeval Mysticism, as exemplified in the Fine Arts, to the various European nations: "La France n'a eu, dans la répartition de l'art religieux, que l'architecture. . . . Les peintres et aussi les sculpteurs sont tous italiens, espagnols, flamands, allemands. . . . Et il en est de même des écrivains mystiques. A quoi bon énumérer les nationalités diverses auxquelles ils appartiennent? Eux aussi sont espagnols, italiens, flamands, allemands; pas un n'est français."[1] He was referring specially to the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth centuries. It seems strange, even though Gothic building did reach its utmost perfection in the Ile de France, that he should so entirely have forgotten or swept aside all the great cathedrals and the rather abundant mystical literature of England; stranger still when we realize that the most perfect and

[1] J. K. Huysmans, *La Cathédrale*, p. 88.

precious portions of English Mysticism belong to just the centuries which he had then in mind.

This book makes no claim to present a detailed and exhaustive criticism of mystical writings in the English tongue, nor to offer a complete or incomplete anthology from these. Its main justification, if it have one, is the belief that English Mysticism, while it does and must, in its main features, resemble all genuine mysticism, yet has distinct characters of its own, which shine clearly and obviously in those writers whose debt to non-English predecessors is small or none, and break through that foreign influence even where it exists, showing by elaboration or addition the marked features of the indigenous attitude. As additional justification I would plead that this English contribution is not less individual and valuable than that of the Platonist Christian writers, of the great Latin Mystics (of classical and later ages), of the Flemings or Germans. This is, no doubt, a daring claim.

It may be wise, since the words mystic, mysticism, and mystical are often nowadays used very loosely by more or less casual and uninstructed people, to make quite clear the meaning to be attached to them here. Sometimes a claim is made that no genuine mysticism exists or can exist outside the Roman commu-

nion.[1] It may be conceded at once that the stricter the Catholicism surrounding the mystic, the less danger does he suffer of falling into the vagaries of individual eccentricity, the less likely is he to stray into unorthodoxy. But that is a very different matter from admitting that no one outside the Latin communion has been or can be a mystic. However, this claim has never been officially made. It is not easy to believe that it ever would be made the matter of an infallible pronouncement.

Nevertheless it is wise and desirable to differentiate; the mysticism of S. John of the Cross, for instance, is not that of Philo, or Plotinus, or William Law, or Traherne; but while differences must be acknowledged, and may be accounted for, it is an abuse of language to deny that fundamental similarity of attitude which entitles each one of them to the name of mystic. It cannot truly be denied that from Plotinus, who was an opponent of Christianity, Christian mystics for generations drew inspiration; yet Dom Louismet explicitly refuses him the name of mystic.[2] Setting aside this plea of entire exclusiveness, it

[1] cf. *Mysticism—True and False*, by Savinien Louismet, O.S.B., ch. vii. Dom Louismet, however, softens the proposition by admitting the theory of "the soul of the Church." The whole chapter should be read by any one desiring to grasp his full position.

[2] ibid., p. 48.

remains to ask, What is the core of mysticism? What is the essential nature of that condition which justly wins the title mystical? It is that whole state which may be described as the desire for, the attitude and conduct which lead to, and the achievement in, an atmosphere of love, of direct intercourse between the human spirit and God Who created it; it is, to use an image of mystical theology, the bursting into a little flame of that "spark at the apex of the soul," which all the while had its origin in the great flame of the divine Fire, and which, having burnt upwards, is at last mingled with its Source.

This mystic "touch," this vision, this "direct communication" is not to be had at will; all mystics agree that it is the gift of God, and comes when and how and for how long He pleases. At the same time certain human predispositions are essential, though the presence of these does not necessarily ensure the coming of the gift, a fact urged extremely clearly and emphatically by S. Teresa: "At last it happened to me, and it still happens sometimes, that our Lord shows me greater secrets, but so that I only see what it pleases Him to show me, without its being in the power of my soul, when she wishes, to see anything beyond."[1] And again: "This fire of the true

[1] *The Autobiography of S. Teresa*, ch. xxxviii.

love of God, which comes from above, is so utterly supernatural, that with my utmost desires and efforts, I could not obtain one single spark if the divine Master, as I said elsewhere, did not grant it to me as a pure gift." [1]

The expression "in an atmosphere of love" needs explication and some fencing off from possible misapprehension. Mysticism is not sentimentality, nor emotionalism, nor flabby desire which refuses to pay the hard price of attainment. Mystical love includes that self-searching cleanness which will not acquiesce in spots and stains, but resolutely tries, here to avoid, there by penitence to efface, them; that thorough-going self-stripping which aims at the removal or destruction of everything—even of things lawful in themselves—which may block the way between a given soul and God, that unreserved self-surrender which gives all, not whispering somewhere in the recesses of a fearful heart "Everything but that." *Da totum pro toto*, said S. Thomas à Kempis; and lest that should prove too hard a saying for frail humanity, he adds the time-long truth, whose reality experience has proved again and again, *Sine dolore non vivitur in amore.*

Here perhaps a caution may be necessary. Though willingness to surrender all is essen-

[1] ibid., ch. xxxix.

tial, the performance is not always demanded in the most absolute and thorough sense. This fact seems to have been overlooked by Mr. Robert H. Thouless, who, in an article entitled "Religious Conversion and Modern Psychology,[1] makes this startling statement: "We may notice . . . a curious feature which makes the records of mystical conversion singularly repellent even to readers who are themselves religious, and on the whole sympathetic towards mysticism. This is the indiscriminate repression of human activities which other people regard as good with those which are generally considered bad. The convert of the ordinary type abandons drink and tries to lead a decent life. With his conversion we can sympathize. But when we find the mystical convert not merely treating his body with unreasonable severity, but also abandoning all the decent and beautiful ties of human affection, and refusing to live a life of social and religious usefulness, we feel that this is something with which no reasonable person can have any sympathy. Yet the inner necessity which drives the mystic to these excesses is undoubtedly a reality for him. Suso and other mystics have felt the temptation to lead an ordinary decent and respectable Christian life as the most subtle and dangerous temptation

[1] *Theology*, Feb., 1921.

they had to face. For them it was clearly a choice between repressing all activities which gave them pleasure, and failing altogether in the attainment of their goal." He sums up, briefly, thus—speaking of a curious and abnormal case of a drunkard : "We have here in a simple form an example of that suppression, so characteristic of mystical conversion, of desires which are commonly regarded as good as well as those which are recognized to be evil." [1]

Since Mr. Thouless claims to be treating "religious conversion from the point of view of scientific psychology," [2] the longer passage I have quoted seems gravely wanting in accuracy and consistency. The charge of "repression" is first launched against mystics as a band, and dwindles down to "Suso and other mystics." Secondly, "decent and beautiful ties of human affection" are not synonymous and co-extensive with "all activities which give them pleasure"; the last word being one of the loosest of psychological terms. Setting aside these contradictions and taking the general drift of the statement, it must be challenged as one of the strangest of misrepresentations of a human condition, so frequently misunderstood and misrepresented. "Decent and beautiful ties of human affection" must include, if they go beyond, the love of children for parents, the

[1] ibid., p. 73. [2] ibid., p. 79.

love of brothers and sisters, the love of friends. We may urge, then, against this monstrous claim, the spiritual friendship which did such service to his over-sensitive soul, between Margaret Kirkby, the nun of Anderby, and Richard Rolle ; the care of Walter Hilton for his "ghostly sister in Christ Jesus," for whose instruction he wrote *The Scale of Perfection*. We may reflect on the home relations of S. Catherine of Siena—clouded for a while by her parents' misapprehension of the real state of affairs, but never by wilful act of her own—and upon that numerous and varied throng of friends and learners who gathered round her ; we may recall the whole life of generous service to others of S. François de Sales, a life full of exquisite friendships. Perhaps most telling of all, we may meditate on S. Teresa's manifold interests, many friendships, love for, pride in, gratitude to her father and her brother Lorenzo, her unfailing humanity, her sparkling wit and humour. These few instances, which could be multiplied, are drawn from four different European nations, from perhaps the four most significant in Europe's life and story.

The Institutional, the Speculative, and the Mystical ; these, in Baron von Hügel's lucid theory, are the three elements of Religion.[1]

[1] Friedrich von Hügel, *The Mystical Element of Religion*, vol. i, pp. 50–3.

Where all are essential, it is idle to attempt exact relative appraisement; but at least of the third it may be said that it has reached to the very centre of life. The Jewish Temple worship, saturated with ritual and ceremonial, was indeed ornate. Filled with symbolism, gorgeous in externals, it could vie with the most splendid pomp of Rome, of the orthodox East, or of our reviving Provinces. But in the midst of all that external, divinely, definitely ordered splendour, there came, out of the innermost heart and experience of devout visionaries — kings, priests, prophets — the mystical Book of Psalms. "What have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire but Thee." [1] The Vulgate has, moreover, those two wonderful renderings, "Benjamin, there, a youth, in ecstasy of mind"; [2] and "Thou enlightenest wonderfully from the everlasting hills." [3]

The ceremonial and the vision were not incompatibles, they were not even merely concurrent streams, but two parts of one whole. Still, in every whole there must be one part which is the very core; the mystical is surely that. Rite and ceremonial, vestments, incense, lights, music, lift the soul (or at any rate some souls, and those not the poorest) to the very gates of heaven; but the mystic's uttermost

[1] Ps. lxxiii. 24. [2] ibid., lxvii. 28. [3] ibid., lxxv. 5.

self-surrender carries him to the sacred Heart, brings him to the immediate Presence of God.

Pages, volumes indeed, could be, have been written about the fundamental nature of mysticism ; but little further essential explanation can be added to that which has been said above. However voluminous the elucidations, or elaborate the illustrations, must it not all come at last to some such simple phrase as direct communication, in an atmosphere of love, between the human spirit and its divine Source ?

But the manifestations of mysticism are not to be dealt with thus simply ; and in the variety of these manifestations, English Mysticism exhibits some singular traits. In the course of the last ten centuries there have been not a few whose mysticism lies as evenly and truly between the accustomed orthodox limits as any which can be found among men and women of other European races ; whose whole spirit, outlook, and behaviour are religiously orthodox in the ordinary sense of the words : who approached God through and by means of the ordinary religious exercises of Catholic Christianity, and using them, finally transcended their bounds as those are fixed for less intuitive mortals, thus joining the mystics ; yet as English mystics adding to the common stock of that particular kind of religious experience,

something racial, possibly something individual, their own distinct contribution.

Not less markedly some others, for example Traherne very notably, and in varying degree Wordsworth, Henry Vaughan and his brother Thomas, with a few more, have come by another path : they have been brought by the mysteries and still more by the beauties of that physical world which after all is God's handiwork. It is quite possible that a racial peculiarity may account, at least in part, for their way. Any careful student of English literature as a whole must know that a vein of awareness of, often deepening into inextinguishable love for, all the processes and aspects of external nature runs through most of our poetry, and is not unknown in our prose. A similar attitude is to be found in these particular mystics, and those who, meeting it there dismiss it as "mere pantheism," seem in danger of denying the elementary Christian tenet that God, and He alone, made the world and all its other inhabitants as well as man, and of forgetting that to belittle the natural world comes dangerously near to despising its Author. They seem too precipitate and temerarious if they will persist in maintaining that those who are led to Him through natural phenomena, and even those who only grope for Him mistily along such ways, can never come to deserve, if they do not dare to claim always, the name "Friends

of God," a title which belongs not only to the members of Tauler's great society in fourteenth-century Strasburg, and has been borne by many another acknowledged mystic, but goes back to the Wisdom literature of pre-Christian days: "For She [Wisdom] is an infinite treasure to men, which they that use, become the friends of God, being commended for the gifts which come of discipline." [1]

[1] Wisdom vii. 14.

CHAPTER I

The Beginnings of English Mysticism

PERHAPS as, so far as I know, such a thing has not been attempted from this particular angle of observation, it may be well, as a preliminary to a study of acknowledged mystics, to note some contributary characteristics, rising possibly here and there to real adumbrations of future attainment, in our earlier literature ; a period and a volume of often beautiful work too little esteemed or known by the mass even of those who might call themselves general readers.

The beginnings of English literature include the purely pagan work either brought by the Saxons in the fifth and sixth centuries, or composed by some of them after their settlement in England, and also that which was coloured by the introduction of Latin Christianity in the South in the sixth century, and of Irish-Celtic Christianity in Northumbria, after Paulinus' flight when Eadwine was killed at Hatfield. Both were almost destroyed by the Danish devastations in the ninth

century—those plunderings, sackings, and burnings which were so thorough and relentless that all records might have been lost had England not found in Alfred a philosopher-king, who first beat back the invaders, and then, by means of foreign scholars and his own literary energy, rescued his country from overwhelming ignorance, sweeping on like a flood.

It is sobering to reflect on the fortuitous threads upon which English literature hung when Alfred came to his own : sobering, because so slight a thing might have snapped them altogether. To his efforts are due the preservation and probably the elaboration of *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, the earliest national history in any North European vernacular ; and to his activity in translating standard Latin works into Anglo-Saxon we owe the *Pastoral Rule* of S. Gregory, Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*, Orosius' *History of the World*, in the speech of his own country and time. The beginnings of our prose must ever be connected with his name. How the bulk of the poetry composed in the earlier ages was preserved from the Danish devastation remains a mystery ; but the facts are that, apart from the poem of our earliest beginnings, *Beowulf*, the manuscript of which is in the British Museum, by far the greater part of our early English poetry is contained in

one manuscript, the *Exeter Book*, which fell into the hands of Leofric, first Bishop of Exeter, who gave it, in the eleventh century, to his cathedral library ; and in one other, the *Vercelli Book*, found by what men call chance in the Chapter Library of Vercelli, so lately as 1882. Outside *Beowulf* and the renderings of Old and New Testament stories generally ascribed to the herdsman of Whitby Monastery, Cædmon, the most important Anglo-Saxon poetry is to be found in these two manuscripts. Had Alfred not come to England's rescue, it seems not unlikely that they would have disappeared for ever. Any one who has not realized the slender chances of the preservation of classics amid the disorder and chaos which recurred so often in the Middle Ages, will find a graphic instance in J. A. Symonds' presentation of Poggio Bracciolini's rescue of Quintilian's *Institutions* from the neglect into which the monks of St. Gall had, by 1414, allowed their library to fall.[1] Though that generation was careless, previous ones had collected and cared for countless Greek and Latin classics, which, but for them, might have perished. England's danger lay in the fact that the Danish destruction of monasteries and of cathedral libraries was so desperately thorough.

[1] J. A. Symonds, *Renaissance in Italy*, vol. ii, pp. 98 et seq.

In his preface to his translation of S. Gregory's *Cura Pastoralis*, Alfred gives us an eye-witness' testimony: "It has very often come into my mind . . . how foreigners came to this land in search of wisdom and learning, and how we should now have to get them from abroad if we would have them. So general was its decay among the English people that there were very few on this side of the Humber who could understand their services in English, or translate a letter from Latin into English, and I believe that there were not many beyond the Humber. There were so few of them that I cannot remember a single one south of the Thames when I came to the throne. . . . When I considered all this, I remembered also how I saw before it had been all ravaged and burnt how the churches throughout the whole of England stood filled with treasures and books."

Alfred's statement is not hearsay, but evidence. Reflecting, with a shiver, on the precariousness of a book's life, students may well render thanks for the preservation of the *Exeter* and *Vercelli Books*.

It is idle to pretend that, save for one, surely indisputable, exception, traces of mysticism, in the proper sense of the word, can be found in our native early poetry ; but it may be justifiably claimed that certain marked

qualities appear, which, if they persisted in the race, might help in later times, if not actually to develop mysticism, at any rate to provide a nursing-ground for it. In one respect this is perhaps understating the case, because if these qualities do not foreshadow the distinctive elements of the more "orthodox" side of English Mysticism, it is not, I think, extravagant to urge that they hold out some promise at least of that other mystical attitude, which works its way to God through the natural world and its phenomena, and which has unquestionably appeared, here and there, as the intellectual and spiritual life of the nation unfolded through the centuries.

Among such qualities or gifts, the peculiar capacity of arriving at the essence of a matter, and so of drawing, not just any picture, but the one and only apt one, and this by means of highly picturesque, suggestive words, will strike any attentive student of Anglo-Saxon poetry at once. Of a race who coined scores and scores of such nouns as *mere-streets* (for the ship's paths over the sea), *slaughter-qualm*, *hearth-enjoyers*, *battle-whirl-of-billows*, *water-fear*, *wave-strife*, *battle-adders* (arrows), *glee-wood* (harp); of such adjectives as *ash-feathered*, *slaughter-greedy*, *snake-coloured*, *blood-marbled*; of such telling phrases as *the dew-feathered eagle*, *faithful peace-weaver*, *gannet's-bath* (the sea), *the raven dark and corpse-greedy*, *the raven*

swart and sallow-brown, winter-freezing wretchedness—to choose a few at random—of such a race great feats of illumined penetration, of really enlightened understanding might be expected to develop eventually. No doubt, the main element in this verbal picturesqueness is imagination proper, the faculty of forming mentally an image of some object no longer present to sense. But into such examples as those given above, something enters which is other than mere reproduction ; there is a strand in them of genuine creation. Psychologists may be right in classing reproductive imagination with the rest of our "sense" capacities ; but creative imagination includes a factor which belongs to the region of extra-sense.

Still, it is quite true that mysticism does not depend on imagination ; indeed S. Teresa declared herself to be lacking in it : "God has not given me the talent for discursive reasoning, nor that of helping myself with the fruits of imagination. This latter faculty is so torpid in my case, that when I desire to picture and represent to my inner thought our Lord's Humanity, I never, whatever effort I make, succeed."[1] But we know that "the wind bloweth where it listeth" ; she was a great mystic, but in this particular an exception.

[1] *Life of S. Teresa by herself*, ch. iv.

As a rule, the mystics have not failed in that special kind of imagination, which, while it serves—so far as human language can reach—for the expression of mystical experience, never can invent or replace that experience.

Again, the English sense, not peculiar to but strongly marked in them, of the awe and mystery of vast tracts of space—containing, concealing who could tell what ?—is a striking feature in our earliest pre-Christian poetry, in *Widsith* and *Beowulf*, for example. Small as our island is, we have always, perhaps by way of escape, responded to spaciousness of sea and sky, and, where we have left it, to roominess of uncultivated forest and moorland waste.

Widsith (if it really be the name of a man) in the earliest English poem (if it were written in England and not brought over from the Continent) describes his wanderings :—

> I have fared thro' many stranger-lands, thro' the spacious earth,

adding a touch which, though it is difficult to indicate exactly where or how it is achieved, has a curious, visionary gleam, elusive but real :—

> where beneath the sky I had known the best
> Of all gold-embroidered queens giving lavishly her gifts.

These lines are ancient, no one, however many guesses be hazarded, positively knows who made them ; we only know that they belong to our own poetic beginnings, being probably the earliest in time of all the poetry garnered in the *Exeter Book*.

The same consciousness of vast spaces and of their inherent possibilities occurs over and over again in *Beowulf*, notably in the description of the fen-demon, the bog-and-morass fiend, Grendel, who "in everlasting night kept the misty moors." His coming is thus described :—

> Then from the moor came
> Under the misty hills
> Grendel ganging,
> God's wrath (he) bare.
>
> . . . . .
>
> Under the clouds he strode.[1]

A third and more important element in our early poetry is our forefathers' resolute and persistent personification of nature and of "things." When a speaker at the first Anglo-Catholic Congress asked the question : "Is it for nothing that the English race finds its deepest interest and its most certain inspiration neither in the laws of a code, nor in the structure of an institution, but in the great

[1] *Beowulf*, ll. 1424 et seq.

mystery of personality itself?" [1] he was dealing with one of the fundamental qualities in the English character. Another speaker dwelt on the same theme: "We have to remember that we live amongst a people disposed to be impatient of any sort of official authority, especially in matters of religion, but prepared to pay almost limitless adoration to the power of personality." [2] This characteristic springs out of a temperament which, in the last resort, seems to find the "sanctions" of conduct rather by its emotional than its intellectual resources; a fixed rule being apparently too galling to a race so capable of responding to the varying appeals of successive leaders, yet prone to insist most of all on its inalienable right, as it views life, of "doing as it likes," in Matthew Arnold's famous phrase, its cherished prerogative of choice at the present instant. This absorbing pre-occupation with personality accounts for not a few of our national achievements, successes and failures alike; and it plays a vital part in English Mysticism. It appears in the earliest records of our race. It has even been claimed that the monster, Grendel, himself is a signal

[1] *Report of the First Anglo-Catholic Congress*, London, 1920: Article, "The Witness of the English Church," by the Rev. C. S. Gillett, p. 121.

[2] ibid., Article, "Authority in Matters of Religion," by the Rev. N. P. Williams, p. 64.

instance of this English tendency to personify: "He is the impersonation of the superstitious dread which men felt when they looked from their island of reclaimed land over the surrounding moors, and saw the strange shapings of the clouds upon them as evening fell, and heard through the mist the roaring of the sea." [1]

Further, as many of their descendants have done, they personified more subtly still by handing on their own powers, feelings, moods to the creatures, the trees, to so-called inanimate things.

In the dawn-days of all races, song, as we know, is pre-eminent: the history, all the crucial, racial happenings are embedded, for preservation's sake, in song; and thus the national story is handed down traditionally. The English were no exception. It seems as if all our forefathers sang or desired to do so: and soon it came natural to them to hand on their widely-spread gift, till at last they attributed it to all and sundry even beyond the limits of the human family. So irrepressible is this impulse to song, so persistent their expectation of it, that they even found it in their war-weapons—

> the bright coats-of-mail
> Sang in their equipment.[2]

[1] Stopford A. Brooke, *History of Early English Literature*, vol. i, p. 51.

[2] *Beowulf*, ll. 650 et seq.

And again—

> a mighty rush he made ;
> With his war-bill,
> Sword-swing withheld not,
> So that on her head
> the ringed-sword sang
> a roaring war-song.[1]

Thus with "Hrunting," the sword he had borrowed from Hunferth, did Beowulf belabour Grendel's mother.

Similarly in the Song of the Fight at Finnesburg—

> the war-wood resounds,
> Shield to shaft answers.

The processes of Nature too are invested with personality—

> the air grows gloomy,
> the heavens shed tears,[2]

and the very funeral pyre shares human passions—

> the flame devoured it all
> Of guests most ravenous.[3]

The same tendency persists after the introduction of Christianity. *The Riddles*, preserved in the *Exeter Book*, whether or no the critics be right who ascribe them to Cynewulf, are admittedly post-Christian. In the

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[1] ibid., ll. 3043 et seq.
[2] ibid., ll. 2755 and 2756. [3] ibid., l. 2249.

twenty-first of these the sword is personified and speaks as a human being might :—

I'm a wondrous wight for the war-strife shapen,
. . . . .
Often do I quell
Breathing men with battle edges . . .
me the weary-with-wayfarings,
Me the stout in battle . . .
Ranging largely, I'm a foe
Cursed of all weapons.

The tone is not always, as here, one of triumph. In the fifty-fourth Riddle the spear, and in the seventy-ninth the helmet, are in sorrowful mood. In the sixth the lament of the shield is even more elaborately personal :—

I am all alone with the iron wounded,
By the sword slash'd into, sick of battle-work,
Of the edges weary . . .
Not one of the Leech-kin
In the folk-stead could I find out,
Who with herbs he has there should heal my wound ;
But the notching on my edges more and more becomes
Through the deadly stroke of swords, in the daylight, in the night.

Perhaps of them all, that very English weapon, the ashen-bow, rises, in its mood of triumphant aggression, to the sharpest outburst of human emotion—

A Wight well-wrought am I, for war enshapen :
If it chance I bend myself and from out my bosom fareth
Venomous an (adder) sting, then I'm all on fire.[1]

[1] Riddle xxiv.

We may compare with this the lines in Cynewulf's *Elene*—

> the ash-spears flew,
> Battle-adders.[1]

This persistent personification of the non-human is a proof of the value set by the English, then as now, on personality, whatever be meant by that perplexing word. Even in their most pagan-days the English were something beyond materialists. Beowulf, on the eve of his great contest with the "fire-worm," says :—

> to us it shall be at the mound
> as Wyrd, lord of every man,
> Shall to us decree.
> I am resolute in mind
> So that against the war-fly
> I lay aside vaunt.[2]

The end of the struggle demonstrates that love for a commanding personality which is so essentially English ; it demonstrates not less the superiority of human love and will to any material means to success. Beowulf, struggling with the appalling monster, strikes him with another famous sword, "Naegling," which, like "Hrunting," earlier in the poem, fails : Naegling "bit less strongly." Then the young warrior, Wigláf, watching, among his fellows,

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[1] *Elene*, l. 140. [2] *Beowulf*, ll. 5045 et seq.

from afar, this unequal single combat, cannot bear it, and crying—

> God knows
> that to me it is far preferable
> that my body
> should clasp fire
> with my Giver-of-gold,

though the rest stay, he wades "through the deadly reek," calling to his chief—

> Beloved Beowulf
> Do all things well,
> as thou in youthful life
> long ago didst say
> that thou would'st not let,
> life being in thee,
> thy greatness sink.

Together, with lesser weapons than "Naegling" which broke at the second stroke, they at last—

> scored
> the worm in the middle.

The help came too late to save Beowulf, who must die of the "fire" which the "worm" breathed into him. Though part of his mission was to rescue the treasure wrongly held by the fire-worm in his sea-cave, Beowulf, at the point of death, does not put that treasure first. His real concern is for his own fidelity to duty,

faithfulness to what Newman called "the light":—

In my land I have sustained vicissitudes,
Held my own well, sought no treacheries,
Nor swore many oaths unrighteously.
I, for all this may, sick with many wounds,
Have joy; because the Ruler of men
Need not upbraid me with deadly injury of kinsmen,
When from my body life shall take leave.
Now go thou quickly the hoard to view
Under the hoar stone, Wigláf beloved;
Now the Worm lieth, sorely-wounded sleepeth,
Bereft of his treasure. Be now in haste,
That I may perceive, the ancient wealth, gold-treasure,
Curious gems, that I may the softlier
After the treasure-wealth resign my life and people
That I long have held.

Moreover, on Beowulf's funeral-pyre, the treasure, for which in part he gave his life, was sacrificed—

They left the treasure of Earls to Earth to hold,
Gold in the dust, where it now yet remains,
To men as useless as ever it was.

Honour, fealty, duty, not treasure, were the goal of our far-off forbears, Beowulf and his trusty liege-man Wigláf.

Of this passage Mr. Stopford Brooke wrote: "Beowulf knows, as he goes forth to the dragon, that Wyrd [1] will now conquer his

[1] Wyrd, the terrible English Fate-goddess, presiding over human destiny, was not theoretically the supreme

body, but she shall not conquer his soul. The moral triumph is attained, and fate, not Beowulf, is really conquered in the contest" :—

> to us it shall be at the mound
> As Wyrd, the lord of every man,
> Shall to us decree.
> I am resolute in mind.

Is it fanciful to wonder if W. E. Henley "threw back" to this primitive attitude in "The Song of the Sword," and specially in the often-quoted—

> Out of the night that covers me
> Black as the pit from pole to pole,
> I thank whatever gods may be
> For my unconquerable soul.[1]

The Riddles belong to Christianized England if not to Christianity. But even while they were still pagan, Englishmen, as *Beowulf* shows, could have an inkling of the true nature of value ; they could at least dream that love, not selfishness, spirit, not body, were, in the last resort, the only Realities. The well-known story — Bede tells it — belonging to pagan Northumbria in the year A.D. 627 illustrates this fact, that a heathen man could discern that it is the spiritual forces, lying all round and

power ; but popular thought often allowed her to slip into the first place : her grim shadow lay swart across everyday life.

[1] W. E. Henley, *Poems*, pp. 49 and 119.

under our visible life, which alone can give sense and meaning to its problems, and redeem humanity from blank materialism. Eadwine, the king, sitting with his council, to listen to Paulinus, was little helped, we gather, by the cynical worldliness of his "elder-priest" Cêfî, and so turned to hear the aged warrior, standing among his fellow thanes and declaring: "Such to me, O king, appears this present life of man on earth in comparison with that time which to us is unknown, like as if thou wast sitting, feasting with thine ealdormen and thanes in wintertide, the fire kindled, thy hall warmed, and it rains and snows and hails and storms without. Comes then a sparrow and quickly flies through the house, goes through one door in, through the other door out. Lo! he, in the time that he is within, is not wet with the winter's storm; but that is but for the twinkling of an eye and the least instant, and he soon cometh again into the winter of winters. Like him, this life of men appears for a little time; what goes before, or what after, we know not. If therefore this new lore bring aught more clear, more fit, it is worth that we follow it."

Translated thus, literally almost word for word, Bede's tale gives us a vivid notion of the wistful, visionary attitude which was at least possible in early England. He may, in telling it, have coloured the story; but it

matters little who uttered it, it is the view of some Englishman not later than the first quarter of the eighth century : though had Bede altered it he would almost certainly have changed the wistful old warrior's dream into a definitely Christian assertion.

Once more, no student of our early life and literature can fail to be struck by the capacity for endurance shown again and again. It is not insensibility or indifference, but a deliberate suppression of immediate desire for the sake of a distant satisfaction ; the steady sacrifice of present impulse to future attainment. In Anglo-Saxon times there is no definite evidence, which cannot be otherwise interpreted, that the mood is mystical ; but it is not extravagant to suggest that the stark self-control of the natural fighting man contained a seed which later, and in changed circumstances, might develop into the saint's self-abnegation. A conspicuous instance occurs in the undated poem, *The Lament of Deor*.[1] In stanza after stanza this poet, who has lost his lord's favour and with it all he values in life, relates the overwhelming sorrow of this, that, or the other man or woman ; but, unfailingly, the refrain recurs—

That he (or she) overwent ; *this* also may I.

There is some probability that *Deor* is later

[1] Preserved in the *Exeter Book*.

than *Widsith* or *Beowulf*, belonging, in that case, to the period after the English settlement, when Latin and Celtic Christianity had introduced new worlds of thought; thought which might presently deflect and colour the natural temperament, the instinctive turning to life's harder, gloomier side, of those who had driven the British west and now occupied their place. Some lines from *The Seafarer*, thought to belong to the first quarter of the eighth century, and, like Deor, post-Christian, may further show this capacity for enduring, patient devotion; show, too, the questing spirit, inclined sometimes to travel beyond material bounds which our ancestors possessed :—

> His heart is not upon the harp, nor on ring-receiving,
> Nor in joy of woman, nor in world's joy;
> Nor in any other thing save only the waves' rolling;
> But for ever hath he longing who sets out to sea.[1]

No one pretends that these passionate "natural" longings for the sea, for home, or for the great spaces of hill and moor are, in themselves, mystical; yet the race in which they are common phenomena may very easily develop mystically. It is not "the flight of the alone to the Alone," but it is the flight of desire, not only to the not-attained, but to something very like the not-attainable.

Possibly one may go a step further yet,

[1] *The Seafarer*, ll. 44–7.

though only in the form of a most tentative suggestion. Among the poems which some scholars think were composed in the eighth century by educated pagans who stood outside Christianity, two—*The Husband's Message* and *The Wife's Complaint*—are charged with human passion. Of these, Mr. Stopford Brooke has written that they exhibit "not a trace of Christianity, save perhaps a certain over-fineness of sentiment." [1] The subject of *The Wife's Complaint* is as simple as it is common in different ages and places. The husband's probably jealous relations, hating his wife, accuse her to him of infidelity or magic. He imposes the conventional penalty—exile—by confining her, in absolute solitude, within a strictly-isolated and fenced portion of a wood. From this comfortless and perhaps perilous prison her lament issues. The following extract from Mr. Stopford Brooke's translation will give an idea of its content and manner :—

I found a man wholly fitted for me,
Yet of soul unhappy, sorrow-struck in spirit,
From me hiding all his heart, holding murder in his thoughts,
Yet so blithe of bearing. O full oft with vows we bound us,
That save Death alone nothing should divide us,
Nothing in the world. Now all changed is that !
. . . . .

[1] *History of Early English Literature*, vol. ii, p. 170.

In a grove within this wood they have garred me dwell,
. . . I am all one long desire!
Dreary is my dwelling! Here my lord's departure
Oft has wrought me wretchedly.

. . . . .

Lovers in the world there are
Who in loving live together . . .
While I, in the early dawning, all alone am going
Where I needs must sit alone, all the summer-lengthened day.

Coventry Patmore, though his theory was hotly combated, insisted that the difference between human passion for man and for God is one of degree, not kind. If he were right there may have been in this yearning lament, which is neither old nor modern, but of every age, some element in the passion of this unknown woman of the eighth century of that consuming devotion to the Divine Lover which Mother Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe of Lynn showed.

When S. Patrick converted the Irish a considerable part of their highly-developed philosophy, Ecna, was incorporated into their Christianity; they being perhaps the only race who succeeded, where many tried and failed, in blending Catholic and racial faith. It was not so in the sister island of the saints. Most characteristically, for generations, the English allowed the old heathen temples, teaching, and literature to live side by side, peaceably, with the new Christian Churches,

doctrine, and learning. The Edwardian and Elizabethan Prayer Books were illustrations of the national capacity for accommodation, for making room for irreconcilables, but by no means the earliest instances of it.

Again, among native tendencies, however far back we go, we find the English conscious, sensitively aware of extra-natural power surrounding their life on this visible earth. At first, and for a considerable time, this power was the Fate-goddess, Wyrd, "who, as Englishmen thought, was mostly against them, so that their life was a heavy-weighted battle."[1]

The grim and passionate conclusion—before a subsequent Christian poet appended the Epilogue which now closes it—of *The Wanderer* may be taken as a comprehensive epitome of their customary outlook :—

> All is full of hardship in this realm of earth,
> Fate's decrees change for the worse in the world beneath the skies.
> Here our property[2] is fleeting, transitory our friend,
> Transitory is man, fleeting is our kinsman :
> All this world's foundation turns to nothingness.[3]

Disillusionment can scarcely be more complete, nor dreary hopelessness more unrelieved. Yet we cannot forget that in an earlier and

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[1] Stopford Brooke, op. cit., vol. i, p. 281.

[2] Feoh, which means cattle or goods : here perhaps it is used rather for our grip on our goods.

[3] *The Wanderer*, ll. 106–110.

other mood the Wanderer bade us remember that—

> The wise man shall be patient,
> Not too passionate, nor too hasty of speech,
> Nor too weak in war, nor too rash,
> Nor too frightened, nor too glad, nor too avaricious,
> Nor never too eager of boasting, before he well knows.
> A man shall wait before he utter boasting.
> Until proud, he knoweth well
> Whither his mind's thought will turn.[1]

However contradictory these two moods may seem, the second passage is instinct with English caution and common sense. Nor need we marvel at the last line's careless fortuitousness, for in their beginnings, as in their developments, the English have always been less philosophical than most other races. Stumbling from one set of facts to another, they take them much as they come, whether corroborative or contradictory; and so they have elaborated no systematic theory of life, but have dealt with emergencies as they arose, heedless of logic and neat explanations. The significant fact, in this tragedy-laden poem *The Wanderer*, is that then, as now, they never knew when they were beaten, and consequently never were. For those who can hold on against all possible odds, who can still play the

[1] *The Wanderer*, ll. 65–72. The reference may be to the great yearly feast when warriors were wont to vow to perform some valorous deed before twelve months had passed.

game, however heavily loaded the dice, final defeat does not exist. Grave, careworn in hard times, exulting in better ones, our forefathers carried on the fight, until with the dawn of Christianity the mood changed, and the goddess who was "always against them" was slowly exchanged for the love of the Father, the redeeming power of the Son, the consolation of the Paraclete. But the change was very gradual; for a long while the two currents of belief ran on side by side without mingling.

Once more, in all their poetry and not seldom in their prose we find the persistent, recurrent English love of nature's beauty. Mr. Stopford Brooke laboured to prove that the north is so cold, bleak, and severe that this love of beauty could not possibly have had birth without Christianity's help; though how Christianity could change a man's judgement of climate and its consequences he scarcely succeeds in showing. Could any one? As a matter of fact, he was wrong. The summer sea can lap lazily in the sunshine on the sandy shores of Lindisfarne; incomparable foxgloves spring in the clefts of the black basalt columns below Northumbria's Roman wall; and over the wide spaces of Yorkshire June flings a gorgeous wealth and variety of flowers which hardly the sunniest south could outdo. On many days at some seasons of the year

"the inhospitable north" is just a fancy, resting on no foundation of fact whatever.

Yet, with his curious trick of contradicting himself, sometimes more than once in the same chapter, Mr. Stopford Brooke, as he turns from the subject of this supposed debt to Christianity, observes: "It is remarkable . . . that the doings of nature should have been made by deliberate choice a separate subject of song. This owes its origin, I think, partly to a special strain in the nature of the northern English, the cause of which I cannot render definite; partly, I believe, to the reading of Virgil. It was no doubt strengthened by an admixture of Celtic blood."[1] If English literature be studied as a whole, and also in some detail, it surely will be found more reasonable to conclude that this love of nature is indigenous in the English temperament; not more northern than southern, owing nothing to Paganism or Christianity, to Latin or to Celt, but racial, of the soil. The love of the homeland, of the landscape, of the homely beauty of this England meets us in our beginnings and runs all through our literature down to to-day:—

> Trees re-bloom with blossoms, burghs are fair again,
> Winsome are the wide plains and the world is gay—

[1] *History of Early English Literature*, vol. i, p. 298.

All doth only challenge the impassioned heart
Of his courage to the voyage whosoever thus bethinks him
O'er the ocean billows far away to go.
Every cuckoo calls a warning with his chant of sorrow !
Sings the summer's watchman.[1]

No one knows for certain the date of these lines ; but in some primitive age the Seafarer, complaining that—

all the glee I got me was the gannet's scream,

turned from such miseries to a recollection of the pleasant country-side.

Similarly, on the ruined, war-scarred fields of Flanders an English soldier bethought himself of his homeland :—

She is very small and very green
And full of little lanes all dense with flowers,
That wind along and lose themselves between
Mossed farms, and parks, and fields of quiet sleep.[2]

This intense love of nature is not mystical ; but out of this racial love there will develop presently the cosmic emotion, or the nature-mysticism as it is more simply called of a Traherne and a Wordsworth.

Since mysticism proper is this book's main business, a discussion of predisposing elements

[1] *The Seafarer*, ll. 48 et seq., in Mr. Stopford Brooke's translation.

[2] Lieutenant Geoffrey Howard, Royal Fusiliers, *Soldier Poets*, p. 47.

must not be unduly lengthened. I will not quote, as I might, from the various renderings of Bible stories, so popular from the time of Cædmon, though scattered through them like flowers in a spring-awakened wood beautiful natural descriptions may be found. Two passages from *The Phœnix* are preferable, since that poem owes nothing to a Hebrew original. I choose these passages because, though some scholars suppose that Cynewulf copied Lactantius, the "natural" passages do not occur in Lactantius, and so presumably are the Englishman's own. The first tells of the miraculous Bird's song :—

> The upringing of his voice
> Than all other song-crafts sweeter is and lovelier ;
> Far away more winsome than whatever winding lay.

The other is the picture of the Bird's death-place :—

> There the wind is still and the weather fair ;
> Pure and holy there shines the heaven's gem ;
> Clouds are cleared away, and the glorious crowds of waters
> Still are standing there ; every storm therein
> Under heaven is hushed.

If the poem be Cynewulf's, "stark" Northumbria had shown him gracious sights, unless those scholars who believe him to be a West-Saxon chance to be right. Such emphasize the fact that the manuscript of *Elene* is written

in the West-Saxon dialect. On the other hand, the *Dream of the Rood*, whose authorship is ascribed to him, is Northumbrian. Perhaps Cynewulf had another source of knowledge, something subtler even than the district to which he belonged.

Lastly, among qualities, traceable back to earliest times, which may be reckoned as pre-requisites, or, at least, as aids to the development, later on, of genuine mysticism, I would include the love of solitude. Often it is a love of actual physical solitude. More remarkable still, belonging probably to the eighth century, is a passage in *The Wanderer*, a poem pagan in spirit, where the solitude is not physical, but the withdrawn aloneness of a reticent heart and soul :—

> In sooth I know
> That in any earl an excellent custom is
> That he firmly bind his heart,
> Guard his hoard-coffer, think as he wills.
> Nor can the disheartened man the Wyrd withstand,
> Nor the fierce heart provide any help.
> Therefore oft do glory-seekers closely bind and cover
> This unhappiness in their own breast-coffers.[1]

There is no gleam of Christianity in that ; Wyrd is still the Fate-goddess who is "against" humanity. All the more significant then, in a sense, is this withdrawal into self ; though we must remember and allow for the fact

[1] *The Wanderer*, 11 et seq.

that as the poem goes on, it becomes evident that the Wanderer's mood is, at any rate, partly due to the loss of friends, of his chief in particular. The Wanderer tells how, in the dream-world, he sees in spirit his "man-lord," again—

> Clippeth him and desireth him.

But with the waking hour dream turns to delusion, and the lonely soul fares forth again to follow the flying goal of love withdrawn :—

> Then wakes again the friendless man,
> Seeth there before him, the fallow waves,
> Sea-fowls bathing, spreading out their feathers,
> Hoar-frost and snow falling with hail bemingled.
> Then the heart's wounds the heavier are,
> With sorrow for the loved one, sorrow is renewed.

Yet through this grim, grey struggle which our forbears seem to have waged with such iron resolution, such valorous refusal to succumb, one poet stands out, who, so far as I know, has never been considered a mystic, and who, for all that, surely was one, possibly the first of his race—Cynewulf. Few positive facts can be established about him, and more recent scholars are less positive than some of the earlier generation of Anglo-Saxon students. Professor Cook[1] hazards the suggestion that the poet was born about A.D. 750 and died

[1] Professor of English Language and Literature in Yale University.

about A.D. 825. Of the poems ascribed to him, at one time or another, it is generally admitted that *The Christ*, *Elene*, *Juliana* are rightly so, since his name is embedded in the verse of each. *The Riddles*, in the *Exeter Book*, have been ascribed to him by some of the earlier scholars without any hesitation. Not a few have thought that the eighty-ninth Riddle was a description of himself. Nowadays his authorship of them is frequently denied. Other poems attributed to him at various times are *Guthlac*, *The Phœnix*, *Christ's Descent into Hell*, *Andreas*, *The Dream of the Rood*, and, much more doubtfully, *The Fates of the Apostles*. Of these, all but *Elene* and the last three just mentioned (all four of which are to be found in the *Vercelli Book*, in a handwriting of the eleventh century) are contained in the *Exeter Book*. Those who wish to pursue the "critical" problem of authorship in more detail will find some further help in the *Cambridge History of English Literature*, vol. i, ch. iv. Mr. Stopford Brooke has rendered the eighty-ninth Riddle, rather freely, as follows :—

> Ætheling am I and to earls am known,
> And not rarely do I rest with the rich and with the poor ;
> Midst the Folks I'm famous. Widely fares (through hall)
> And for me, a foreigner, rather than for friends—
> Loud, the plunderers' applause, if that I should have
> Glory in the Burghs, or the goods that shine.

Also very great the love that well-witted men
Have of meeting me. I to many folk
Wisdom do unveil. Not a word on earth
Then is said by any man. Though the sons of men,
Though the Earth-indwellers, eagerly seek after
Footprints that I leave, frequently I hide
From all men that are my (unfollowed) way.[1]

Setting aside the solution sometimes offered —*the moon*—for a more human one, this enigma is not only interesting because it deals with a nobly-born youth, equally at home with rich and poor, famous and beloved, more popular indeed sometimes, as the obscure fourth and fifth lines mean to say, than the home-born singers in the strange places where he lodges; all these details are ordinary enough. But it startles and arrests a reader who is searching our literature for the beginnings of religious intuition, when, at its close, it affords a possible glimpse of a leader faring forth as a hidden guest, the track of whose feet fades, leaving no clue to his "way." It is but the barest hint, yet, I believe, it strikes a new note in our literature. Moreover it does not stand alone; we find a clearer instance in Cynewulf's undoubted work, *Elene*. If those scholars be right who attribute *The Riddles* to him, of course the two passages gather interest from each other. If they be

[1] Stopford A. Brooke, *History of English Literature*, vol. i, p. 10.

by different men, then probably Cynewulf was the second instead of the first of our mystics. The poem *Elene* (whose subject is the Invention of the True Cross by the Empress Helena) is thought by many scholars to be based on the *Vita Quiriaci* in the *Acta Sanctorum*, May 4th. Quiriacus (or Cyriacus) was Bishop of Jerusalem. Most scholars agree that Cynewulf worked from a Latin translation.[1]

A comparison of the Anglo-Saxon text with this Latin one seems to me to show that more than once Cynewulf expands his Latin original in a way which suggests a clear mystical tendency: while the passage which I desire to claim as truly mystical occurs in the fifteenth and last section of *Elene*, and has no basis whatever in the Latin, and therefore, apparently, must be the poet's own work. Before I quote this, I may draw attention to three expanded passages, as I venture to call them. The first occurs when Constantine, alarmed by the Huns, on the eve of battle fell asleep and saw, in a vision, a messenger drawing his attention to the Cross in the heavens. The Latin is as follows: "*Ea vero nocte veniens vir splendidissimus suscitavit eum, et dixit, 'Constantine, noli timere, sed respice sursum in cælum, et vide': et*

[1] The Anglo-Saxon poem has been edited, with the Latin version printed at the bottom of the pages:—*Elene*, edited by C. W. Kent, Professor of English in the University of Tennessee. (Published by Ginn & Co.)

intendens in cœlum vidit signum Crucis Christi, ex lumine claro constitutum, et desuper litteris scriptum titulum '*IN HOC VINCE.*'" The corresponding passage in *Elene* is, literally rendered in modern English, as follows :—

Then was, in sleep, shown to the Caesar himself
Where he slept among his followers,
Seen by the renowned-in-victory the noise of a dream.[1]
It seemed to him shining[2] in appearance, in man's shape,
White and hue-bright. I know not which of the heroes
Showeth more glorious than, before or since, he
Saw 'neath the skies. He, covered with the sign of war[3]
Awaked from sleep. To him quickly the messenger
Beautiful ambassador of glory spoke,
And named by name (the night's helmet split apart) :[4]
"Constantine, the King of the angels
The Wielder of Weirds, the Lord of Hosts,
Ordered His favour to protect thee. Fear not for thyself.
Though the strange people threaten thee with terror,
With hard battle. Look thou to the heavens,
To the Guardian of Glory : there thou findest help,
Victory's token." He was soon ready
Through this holy hest, opened his soul's lock,
Upwards looked, as the ambassador, lovely weaver
Of peace, bade him. He saw bright with ornaments
The beautiful Tree of Glory, above the clouds' roof
With gold adorned, glisten with gems.

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[1] Noise is the literal meaning : some translators render it *vision*.

[2] Beautiful (?).

[3] On his helmet was an image, the sign of the bear.

[4] The coming of darkness being pictured as earth pulling on a helmet, which helmet was shattered by the messenger's brilliance.

The brilliant white cross was with characters written,
Bright and light : "With this Beacon, thou
In the terrible danger, wilt overcome the foe,
Hinder the hated crowd." Then, that light vanished,
Upwards journeyed, and the ambassador, simultaneously,
Into the hosts of the cleansed. The King, prince of warriors,
Was the blither and freer from sorrow,
In life-spirit through that fair sight.

The passage could be rendered more smoothly, indeed Professor Garnett has provided a far more graceful translation ;[1] but perhaps the roughness of my version may be borne for the sake of its preservation of the core of the poem's meaning. No one can compare the Latin with this expansion without wondering how and why it happened. The whole is pitched in another key, set in another atmosphere, illumined with another radiance. *Splendidissimus* is a eulogistic word, but Cynewulf has managed to drown the vision in supernal glory, unearthly light. The image of the night's darkness being cleft by light, like a helmet split in two by irresistible power, is not in the original ; nor is the picture of the golden, jewel-encrusted cross gleaming against the cloud-roof ; nor is there any mention of Constantine's response when he opened his

[1] *Elene* (and other Poems), translated by J. M. Garnett, M.A., LL.D., formerly Professor of English Language and Literature in the University of Virginia. (Published by Ginn & Co.)

soul's-lock. Lastly, the withdrawal of the light upwards and of the ambassador—that "fair weaver of peace," whose proper place is with the "cleansed"—is the English poet's addition.

If we may credit Cynewulf with mysticism, if we may fairly believe that supernatural light, purgation, the responsive soul, all the familiar environment of the mystic were within his ken, then these expansions are explained, as they hardly yet have been by his modern editors. Perhaps, after all, some trace of theology and philosophy may not be wholly out of place in the difficult, fascinating work of interpreting Early and Middle English Literature.

Then we turn the pages of *Elene*: Constantine has won the once-dreaded battle, but he has not forgotten the vision. He summons the wisest to his synod, and demands if there be any, elder or younger, who can tell—

> whose was this beacon,
> That to me so light appeared and, most luminous of signs,
> My people saved and gave me glory,
> War-speed against enemies, through that beautiful tree?

Again, this is an obvious addition to the Latin, whose terse comment is: "*Veniens autem Rex Constantinus in suam civitatem, convocavit omnes sacerdotes omnium deorum vel idolorum: et quaerebat ab eis cuius vel quid esset hoc signum Crucis, et non poterant dicere ei.*" But, quite apart from the matter of actual addition of ideas is

the fact that some of the Anglo-Saxon words used might easily be vehicles of mystical meaning. For example, the superlative *torhtost*, meaning most luminously radiant, is used in conjunction with two words which constantly recur in language applied to the Teutonic gods : *tacen*, meaning sign or token, and *tîr*, meaning glory. It is widely admitted that *tîr* is etymologically connected with the name of the Teutonic analogue of the Roman Mars, the god *Tiw*. It has already been pointed out that the acceptance of Christianity was compatible with an easy tolerance of the ancient gods : the two streams of thought and worship flowed, for a time, side by side.

It is interesting to notice that Professor Kent observes that if *tîr* were spelt with a capital, and a comma were omitted after *forgeaf*, the change "would give us a sentence entirely heathen."[1] The suggestion that we have here a trace of mysticism demands no change, the passage could remain as it stands, which to some may further recommend my hypothesis.

A third passage, of a different sort, but still expanding the Latin in a fashion not unnatural in a mystic, may lend further support. It occurs in section iv. The Empress Helena, sent by Constantine to Jerusalem to search for the true Cross, thus, in the Latin version,

[1] op. cit., p. 172.

addresses the Jews: "*eum qui mortuos vestros vivificabat in mortem tradidistis, et lucem tenebras existimastis, et veritatem mendacium, pervenit in vos maledictum quod est in lege vestra scriptum.*" [1] Cynewulf's rendering, put as before into literal modern English, runs thus :—

Ye soon to death
Began to condemn the One, Who, Himself, from death
Awakened a multitude, from the crowd of men,
Of your own kin, to that former life.
So ye, mind-blinded, began to mingle
Lying with truth, light with darkness,
Hate with favour, and with wicked thoughts
Wove crime. Therefore the curse
Scatters you, the laden with guilt. The clear-bright Might
You began to condemn ; and in error ye lived
In darkened thoughts unto this day.

From the mystical point of view the most striking passage of all occurs in the last section, the fifteenth, which is entirely the English poet's work, an addition unsuggested by anything whatever in the Latin version, which has no fifteenth section, but breaks off at the close of the fourteenth.

Too often have the editors and critics of Early English Texts dismissed "additions" (particularly by a Christian poet to a heathen poem) as of no interest or merit. Sometimes the condemnation is deserved. But a person to whom religion means little or nothing might

[1] *Elene*, edited by Professor Kent, p. 30.

still remember how universal, through the races of men, the religious instinct has been found to be; might try to realize that the development through the ages of any human tendency has its abiding interest for the philosopher. Those who "emancipate" themselves, as they call it, are apt to fall sometimes into oddly unexpected, narrow little traps. In this case, however, Professor Cook attaches particular importance to this "Epilogue," as throwing light on the person and circumstances of Cynewulf. So much is this so that he gives an exceedingly considered translation of it word by word.[1] But when, on the following page, he sets about explaining the passage, no glimmer of a thought occurs to him that its author might be found among the mystics. One instance of his exegesis may suffice. The lines 1246–1249, extraordinarily suggestive, but hard to translate, when rendered as literally as possible, run thus :—

> Before Lore, through the form of light, (He) lent to me,
> An old man, by way of help, a glorious[2] gift,
> The Mighty King meted out and poured into my mind;
> Clearness[3] opened, making the days more roomy.[4]

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[1] A. S. Cook, *The Christ of Cynewulf.* Introduction, p. lxvi. (Published by Ginn & Co.)

[2] Or blameless.

[3] The noun *torht* again : it might be translated bright shining.

[4] Professor Kent suggests "extended or widened with time"; surely a most obscure phrase here.

The word *lâre* (our modern lore), meaning learning or instruction, Professor Cook boldly translates by inspiration, while in subsequent explanations he seems to think that it might cover special grace, or even prophecy. But the words *purh lêohtne hâd* are the crux of the passage ; these I have translated "through the form of light," though, grammatically, they should be "through light form." I take this as capable of meaning the mystic's "light," the "spark," Pascal's *Feu*, *Feu*, *Feu*. Professor Garnett, in his English translation of *Elene*, renders it "through light-bringing office." Mr. Stopford Brooke suggests "in His luminous way." Professor Cook's translation of the whole passage is, "before he bestowed inspiration through the bright order (i.e. the clerical office, *or* those in Holy Orders) as a help to the aged man." And his interpretation of it is : "Then God's ministers instructed me (*or perhaps* I took orders) when I was no longer young, and God Himself has inspired me by the gift of His grace." [1]

Probably now, so late in time, no decision can be arrived at ; but when the whole passage is considered—it is quoted a little further on—some may prefer *Feu* to Holy Orders. Into this passage no question of Christian against pagan enters ; it is the difference between one

[1] op. cit., p. lxvii.

man and another which strikes us. The loan from Quiriacus having come to an end, Cynewulf chooses to give his readers just a glimpse of himself as he really was, that is as he seemed to himself. Part of this description would be comprehensible if Cynewulf were the author of *The Riddles*, and in the eighty-ninth was writing autobiographically. In this postcript to *Elene* he describes his vanished youth : from line 125 onwards, he speaks of having been, when young, oppressed with care, he calls himself (partly to include a syllable of his own name) a "flickering pine-torch";[1] he admits having received "appled gold," which sounds such a pleasant gift; "treasures" he calls these, in the mead-hall, thus recalling that Ætheling of the Riddle who, foreigner though he was, was more popular than the natives, or, at any rate, won more applause. Further, he seems to have been a happy rider on a gaily caparisoned charger, the characteristically English love of animals appearing early in our literature. But the mystical passage relates to his old age; the lines open section xv, four lines of which I have already quoted :—

Thus I, old, and on account of that frail house[2]
Ready to die, word-craft wove and wonderfully gathered,

[1] Cên is the rune, and also means *resin*.
[2] His worn-out body.

At times reflected upon and sifted the thought
Closely, of a night.[1] I knew not accurately
The rights of the Rood until wisdom, with roomier thought
Through the glorious knowledge of the soul's reflection
Disclosed it to me. I was stained with works,
With sins ensnared, with sorrows tortured,
By bitter things bound, by troubles oppressed.
Before Lore, through the form of Light, (He) lent to me,
An old man, by way of help, a glorious[2] gift,
The Mighty King meted out and poured into (my) mind,
Opening clearness, making the days more roomy ;
Bone-house unbound, breast-lock opened,
Song-craft unlocked, which I joyfully broke forth in
With will, about the world. Of that tree of glory
Not once but often I had in memory
Before I had that wonder revealed,
About that bright tree, as in books I found,
As fate fell out, in writings made known
That beacon of victory.

Taking the whole passage together, and assuming the legitimacy of translating the difficult phrase in the sense which I have suggested as mystical light, the main points are that Cynewulf was oppressed with sin and sorrow, and apparently during this period had lost his old gift of song ; that in this spiritual darkness he meditated often on the mystery of the Rood, till finally the Mighty King, through the form of Light, revealed

[1] Or perhaps "in the oppression at night."
[2] Or blameless.

truth to him, which he "saw" with the true mystic's way of vision, not learning it now from books, though previously he had learned something so; and that as a consequence his gift of song wonderfully returned, and he sang the truth of the Cross about the world. Noteworthy is the distinct difference he makes between book-knowledge and "immediate" conviction.

How is this mood distinguishable from mystical illumination which follows on consciousness of sin, purgation, and meditation? No doubt these lines should be considered in the light of the three previous passages which I have quoted and discussed; for they suggest that whatever else Cynewulf was or was not, he had certain predispositions and that "spark in the soul" which one day will set all life ablaze and flare up to God.

If it ever should be proved that Cynewulf wrote the eighty-ninth Riddle, then the whole matter becomes still more convincingly plain. We there have a picture of a noble youth, attached to some court, living his joyful successful life, but not wholly satisfied therewith. A romantic setting forth on a great quest is a natural result; we note the half-wistful, and perhaps half-boyishly mischievous, concealment alike of the end and way. Beyond doubt there is the conviction of a goal to be attained only by sustained effort. Thus far the Riddle

would carry us. Then the Epilogue to *Elene* would tell of the chilling change wrought by experience and sin, and, as in a much later poet, Henry Vaughan, with this sense of sin comes that of estrangement. Finally, after sorrow, bitterness, and prolonged meditation, the "light" breaks in ; conviction is immediate, intuitive ; at last he possesses direct knowledge given by the Mighty King, knowledge never to be attained by any mere effort or exercise of human will ; a gift, recognized by the recipient as spontaneous, supernatural. If these two be by the same hand, they are a precious proof from that far-off, storm-tossed eighth century of the possibility of English Mysticism ; a first light in the morning sky, as the dawn begins to fret night's gloom.

Perhaps many people of to-day (legatees whether or no they care to remember and recognize it of so long and varied a line of saints and doctors), scarcely realize not only the limitations but the appalling violence and disorder of the seventh and eighth centuries in Western Europe. If Rome herself had partially recovered from the Barbarian irruptions, North-Western Europe, or vast tracts of it, was still in chaos. It is true that in the seventh century Ireland, withdrawn and to a great extent isolated by the turbulent sea, was a little island home of so rare and beautiful a learning that it was customary, outside

her shores, to conclude that any man knowing Greek was Irish-born or Irish-bred or both.

But in England, at any rate, scholars were few; Bede, in far Northumbria on the banks of the Tyne, trimmed learning's lamp. We are dealing with England before Alfred, and still more with Europe, before the general mind recovered from the disaster of war under the gradual re-illumination effected by the great mediaeval saints and doctors, Odo and Bernard of Chartres, Bernard of Cluny, Thomas Aquinas, Anselm of Bec, and the rest. In the eighth century Europe was only beginning to settle down. Things were less hopeless than in those days of the fifth century when the Burgundian barbarians were terrorizing Auvergne, and the poet-bishop Sidonius Apollinaris, being reproached for his abandonment of poetry, answered, "How can I write six-foot verses when surrounded by seven-foot barbarians?" But the general conditions were still singularly unsuited not only to the growth of literature, but also to the calm peace which the mystic seeks.

Then again, monasticism, that great shelter of scholars and scholarship, by whose aid so largely Europe recovered from a vast and foundation-shaking catastrophe, was still young so far as the North and West were concerned: Monte Cassino was founded when the sixth century was well on its way, in A.D. 529. The

part played in European reconstruction by the Church, and by it in the years when monasticism was strongest has been thus described: "When the Empire broke up the Church held together. It was—again to use an ecclesiastical simile—a kind of ark in which civilization was carried across the disorder of the first five centuries after the barbarian invasions. The unity of Western Christendom was the source of such unity as was maintained in West European society in this chaotic period. The Church, strong in its cohesive organization, conscious of its complete intellectual superiority to the barbarian invaders, possessing in its teaching and ceremonial the one mode of intellectual influence capable of powerfully impressing their rude minds, and gaining fresh vigour from its successful struggle with disorder—made itself a place of the first importance in the barbarian kingdoms formed out of the break-up of the Roman Empire and out of the Teutonic nations outside, over which its sway was gradually extended. The fact is manifest in English history, no less than in that of France or Germany, and also in Spain between the Gothic and the Moorish conquests." [1]

Readers of R. W. Church's *The Beginning of the Middle Ages* will recall his description of the mutilation and dismemberment of Europe

[1] Henry Sidgwick, *The Development of European Polity*, p. 223.

after the fall of the Roman Imperial power, when, in his words, all seemed "hopelessly wrecked without prospect of hope or escape"; they will remember his not less striking account of the stupendous effort which effectual reconstruction demanded. No doubt England lay somewhat apart then from the main current of West European life; and it must not be forgotten that in the latter half of the eighth century, just the part covered by Cynewulf's life, the school of Æthelbert and Alcuin at York won European fame, and this despite the fact that Alcuin, summoned to conduct the Palace School wherever Charlemagne pitched his court, had considerable difficulty—to that monarch's lively entertainment—in sustaining his reputation against the modernists of his day, whom Charles invited and entertained with equal gusto.

But from whatever standpoint we view the eighth century, Cynewulf the soldier-poet, the friend of all and sundry, now the joyous poet, then the guilt-burdened penitent, is a figure so unique and remarkable that the almost total oblivion into which his name and work have fallen is a significant sign of our massive national carelessness about "the things which are more excellent."

CHAPTER II

English Mystics of the Middle Ages

ALL that I have written so far is introductory to genuine, fully-developed English Mysticism.

When we come to the mystics proper, to "les âmes qui, se dégageant parfaitement des créatures, n'ont plus d'autres occupations que de s'unir intimement à Dieu," as Père Champion de la Mahère called them in his dedication to the Blessed Virgin of his Life of Père Jean Rigoleuc,[1] to that company of men and women whose work, so far as England is concerned, began probably with Margery Kempe, the Ancress of Lynn, towards the close of the thirteenth century, we are dealing with a people which differs somewhat from the English race which settled down here between the fifth and eighth centuries. In the interval many strains had filtered in, and by the thirteenth century we are confronted with that composite, complex, contradictory agglomeration which retained the old name, and which with further and still

[1] Quoted in le Rev. Père Henri Bremond's *Histoire Littéraire du Sentiment Religieux en France*, vol. v, p. 5.

more remotely derived racial additions we still, to-day, call English. Rightly too, it would seem, because it is the peculiar gift of the dwellers in this country, south of the Tweed, to proceed not by change on and through an alien influx ; but by absorption of some alien qualities, and by a quiet indifference to and ignoring of the rest, an indifference which appears to end in their extinction. Perhaps the faults as well as the virtues of the English spring from this strange capacity for rejection and selection, a capacity which some other nations find curiously exasperating.

In between the Anglo-Saxon literature, already, if inadequately, considered, and the work which begins with Margery Kempe, there is a transition literature, in which indications and traces of the mystical temper and attitude can be found, the best example of which is perhaps the quaint little treatise, *Hali Meidenhad.*

There is one reason, to which possibly adequate weight and consideration have not always been given, why the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries are the golden age of orthodox English Mysticism, a reason not connected with the general outburst of Mysticism in Northern Europe : viz. that the men and women of that time, born before the disastrous rent of the sixteenth century, lived and worshipped and died untroubled by those doubts

and controversies which have gathered and grown since.

The damage and sin of divisions are not overwhelmingly convincing to the ordinary run of people to-day; and those who have come to believe that fierce competition in the industrial world may quite well be ruinous, are sometimes none the less found announcing that "competition among religious sects is healthy," keeping them alive and energetic. What sort of life it fosters they seldom stay to inquire. Disastrous in every region of religious life, the strife consequent on divisions is just destructive of the mystical attitude and of mystical practice. But in those two great centuries, whatever difficulties and even disorders occurred, the bitterness of strife on religious fundamentals was not present: and this settled faith is reflected in the mystical literature of the time, and it exhibits a completeness and security of thought and feeling which have been wanting since. The twentieth-century student need not hunt the fourteenth century with a literary microscope for faint hints of a mystical point of view, as he must in the days and works of Alfred; or wonder as he may whether, if the written works of S. Dunstan, England's "first Education Minister," had not perished, there would be revealed some mystic touches. In that great age they are preserved for us, full of mystical teaching,

whether for the student or the devotee or both. So much is there that one is tempted to believe that such an outpouring occurred, while the country's religious unity gave it a favourable environment, in order that evidence might at least remain, however it were neglected, to prove the heights and depths and amplitudes of experience of which Englishmen could be capable.

If it really be, which seems impossible, the work of Bishop Richard Poore, *The Ancren Riwle* is the earliest in time, for he died in 1237. Next comes the widely-forgotten but beautiful *Luve Ron* of Thomas de Hales, "one of the Gloucester men," whose work is assigned to 1230 or thereabouts; a poem which sets love to God over against and far beyond any human passion, and esteems the knowledge of Him as far above all other possible wealth. The Latin inscription says, "Here begins a song which Brother Thomas of Hales, of the Order of Friars Minor, composed at the instance of a maiden dedicated to God." Out of its two hundred and ten lines the following, which I have rendered into modern English, may give some idea of its tenour :—

Stanza 1.

A maid of Christ earnestly bade me
That I should make her a love song.

. . . . .

I will not anywise refuse her
I will teach her as I can.

2. Maiden here thou mightest behold,
This world's love is not a race.
And is so variously beset
Lying and worthless, weak and false,
Those servants, who here were bold,
Have glided away like the wind's breath.
Under mould they lie cold
And fade away as doth meadow-grass.

. . . . .

4. None is so rich and none so free
But he shall soon go hence away,
Nor ever may his warrant be
Gold nor silver, vair nor grey.

. . . . .

Such is this world as thou mayst see
As the shadows that glide away.

. . . . .

9. Where are Paris and Helen
Who were so bright and fair of face,
Amadis, Tristram, and Dido,
Iseult, and all of those?
Hector with his sharp household,
And Caesar, rich with this world's wealth,
They have passed out of the world
As an arrow from the bowstring.

. . . . .

11. Maiden, if thou willest a lover,
I will show thee the one true King.

12. A sweet one if thou knowest,
The good virtues of this Child.
He is fair and bright of hue,
Of glad cheer, of manner mild.
Of lovesome pleasure, true of trust,
Free of heart, of powerful wisdom.

. . . . .

13. Maiden, to thee He sends His message
And willeth to be known to thee.

. . . . .

15. What tellest thou of any house
That builded the wise Solomon?
Of jasper, sapphire, and pure gold
And of many another stone?
It is fairer in many a way
More than I can tell you.
This mansion is promised to thee,
If thou beest His love.

. . . . .

18. No man can behold Him
As He is in all His might,
And be without bliss
When he seeth our Lord.
The sight of Him is all joy and glee,
He is day which knows no night,
There is no maid so wholly blessed
As she who dwells with such a Knight.

. . . . .

26. When thou sittest in longing
Draw thou forth this same script.
With sweet voice sing thou it,
And do as it thee bids.
To thee He hath sent one greeting
God Almighty be with thee,
And permit thee to come to be His Bride
High in heaven where He sits.

Next in time to this poem, but far more definitely mystical, is the fragment which remains of the work of Margery Kempe, of Lynn; that is, it is the next if she be identical with that Margery who between 1284 and

1298 gave certain land at Canterbury to the Prior of Christ Church there.

The greatest and most important individual contribution to the century's mysticism is the work of Richard Rolle, who died in 1349; both in matter and bulk it stands alone. Next comes Mother Julian of Norwich, a mystic whose writings have no precise parallel, so uniquely personal are they. She reached the age of 100, and was, according to her own account, still writing in the year 1373; and besides these there is Walter Hilton, who died in 1396.

Scattered about in manuscripts there remain some anonymous treatises: *The Cloud of Unknowing*, the longest and possibly the most original of them all; *The Epistle of Prayer*; *A very necessary Epistle of Discretion in Stirrings of the Soul*; *The Treatise of Discerning of Spirits*; *The Epistle of Privy Counsel*, together with two translations from Latin into Middle English, viz. *Dionise Hid Divinite* (which is a paraphrase from the author known as Dionysius the Areopagite) and *Benjamin Minor*, originally the work of the twelfth-century mystic, Richard of S. Victor, who, though of Irish or Scots descent, was a pupil of the great scholastic prior of the Abbey of S. Victor, Hugo.

All these seven (if we reckon the last two in their Middle English dress) belong to the

fourteenth century. Mr. Edmund Gardner has published modern English renderings of most of them in a little book called *The Cell of Self-Knowledge*. These various works, chiefly prose, though Rolle occasionally wrote verse, make up the great body of mystical writings, which must draw some to the fourteenth century, so long as any care and love for our literature remains. Outside these are fugitive poems and scraps of prose which exhibit traces of mysticism. There are, e.g., the interesting remains of the poems of Godric, a north-country shipmaster, who in his earlier years was kept by his ordinary business sailing about the North Sea, though twice he went as far as Jerusalem, once carrying its king, Baldwin, to Jaffa ; and the other time visiting Rome on his way through the Mediterranean. His early career was variegated, and had something of the buccaneer's spirit about it. Then, in his middle age, he changed his bearings, and becoming eventually a hermit, he lived thus till he died full of years in 1170. In these later days, in his hermitage in Co. Durham, he had visions. He himself declared that our Lady in vision taught him this hymn :—

Saint Mary, O Virgin
Mother of Jesus Christ the Nazarene
Receive, protect thy Godric,
Receive, bring him gloriously with thee to God's kingdom.

Saint Mary, Bower of Christ?
Maidenhood's purity, flower of Mothers,
Blot out my sin, reign in my mind,
Bring me to bliss with very God.

Further, it is related that after his sister's death Godric, being troubled about her state, was relieved by a vision of her spirit in the care of the Blessed Virgin and of two men in white robes, when he heard her chant from the altar-stone a couplet declaring that Christ and our Lady had placed her there for safety.

Besides these, three prayers remain which all contain a strand of mysticism, viz. *Lofsong of ure Lefdi*, *Wohunge of ure Louerde*, and the *Lofsong of ure Louerde*.[1]

Of the earlier, partly mystical works, *Hali Meidenhad* is a good example. Of uncertain authorship, it is addressed to some anchoresses, the Ladies of Tarrent, in Dorsetshire, for whom, as it is generally thought, *The Ancren Riwle* was also composed. No doubt it exalts the celibate life in a fashion whole-hearted enough to startle unprepared modern ears; but if Professor Atkins be justified in complaining that the author "derides rather gracelessly the troubles of the married state,"[2] he tends towards undue severity when he

[1] All three will be found in No. 29 (Original Series) of the E.E.T. Society's publications.

[2] *Cambridge History of English Literature*, vol. i, p. 229.

declares that "the methods of the writer are entirely wanting in that gentle grace and persuasion which are found elsewhere. He sets forth his arguments in a coarse and repellent manner."

Surely not all of them? Moreover, expressions which repel academic ears in the critical twentieth century may have sounded differently to the Ladies of Tarrent in or about 1200.

Though *Hali Meidenhad* is not ostensibly mystical, passages in it are in the true vein of English Mysticism; e.g. one on the subject of the essential first step, *purgation*. The insistence on genuine inner purification, mortification, and restraint is identical with the counsel which permeates all mystical literature of the English fourteenth century, and which informs all orthodox mysticism, but which is increasingly absent as the sense of personal sin wanes with the inrush of modern self-assertion. No one can really appreciate the nature of mysticism who does not understand the meaning of purgation; and as the French, with their genius for driving ideas to their logical conclusion, are singularly lucid in describing what self-renouncing purgation can mean, it may be advisable to describe it in the words of two French Jesuits of the seventeenth century: "Il ne faut donc que renoncer une bonne fois à tous nos intérêts et à toutes nos satis-

factions, à tous nos desseins et à toutes nos volontés, pour ne dépendre plus désormais que du bon plaisir de Dieu." [1] The same point of view is presented by Père Surin: "Ce premier pas . . . c'est une volonté déterminée de laisser tous les empêchements à la sainteté, et de renoncer aux propres satisfactions, pour demeurer en la présence de Dieu et opérer en sa lumière le bien qui sera connu, sans lui rien refuser. Or peu de personnes se mettent dans cet ordre et chemin, voilà pourquoi elles ne sont pas pour parvenir à ce bienheureux état ; et quoiqu'elles fassent beaucoup de bonnes choses, elles demeurent pourtant en arrière et ne peuvent être dites véritablement parfaites." [2]

Commenting on these passages, Père Bremond writes: "Il n'est pas question de changer d'ordre, de monter plus haut. Mais simplement, l'on est pressé de 'renoncer une bonne fois,' à tous les intérêts, à toutes les volontés propres, de 'faire le sacrifice entier' ; de se 'mettre dans une parfaite nudité d'esprit.'[3] De cette perte de soi-même on ne voit pour l'instant que l'horreur presque infinie : on hésite devant le vide affreux qui va se faire, et l'on n'imagine pas la plénitude qui doit

[1] Rev. Père Louis Lallemant, *La Doctrine Spirituelle*, p. 66.

[2] Rev. Père Surin, *Catéchisme spirituel*, p. 258.

[3] nudus nudum Jesum sequi, *de Imit. Christi* iii. 37.

suivre, si l'on accepte, si l'on abandonne, si l'on 'franchit le pas.'" [1]

So, let none make a mistake. Purgation is not solely a matter of cleansing the soul from sinfulness, and from actual committed sins, hard as all that may be. But it is "to give up once for all," "to make the entire sacrifice"; words easy to write, easy to utter, but to practise, how infinitely, almost intolerably hard. As long as the world lasts, the pain-wrung cry from Gethsemane will stand as the sobbing prayer of the last extremity of the soul, which in suffering makes "no reservation": "If it be possible, let this cup pass from Me: nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt."

"Ce premier pas" need not necessarily be obvious, apparent to others, a material deprivation, a self-stripping which the world at large can perceive or chatter about. The mainspring of it all is the inner mood which sets resolutely to surrender whatever God demands; it may be little, much, or all; but the one thing fatal to its perfection is the hesitating, but so common, qualification, "anything, everything, but *that*!"

In spite of the quaint humour, the often homely simplicity and intense directness and the restrained sobriety of the early English Mystics, a self-containment which to students

[1] Rev. Père Bremond, *Histoire Littéraire du Sentiment Religieux en France*, vol. v, p. 25.

of Latin and Flemish Mystics may perhaps sometimes seem chilly, we must not deceive ourselves about the reality of their fervour. They really did make no reservation, they actually reached the point where human fears—no matter what may be the seeming magnitude of possibly impending dangers—have passed into the place where they can be felt no more; at any rate, this is true of our fourteenth-century mystics. With them (if possibly Walter Hilton should be excepted, though his disclaimer of practising mysticism is not altogether convincing) it is no question of writing from the outside of an experience which others, but not they themselves, have had: these men and women have "given all for All."

It is something less intense than this which is to be found in *Hali Meidenhad*, edited by Mr. Cockayne for the Early English Text Society.[1] As that text may not be accessible, or even easily intelligible to every reader, I have rendered the most pertinent passages into a form which I hope avoids the obscurity and yet keeps some real flavour of the original. The reference in the first passage is, as is obvious, to the "religious" life, a reminder as to the meaning of vocation; but the mystic may find in it a summons to that simple, deliberate detachment and self-oblation without which mystical

[1] Original Series, No. 18.

union must ever remain impossible: "Serve God alone, and all things shall for thee turn to good. And take[1] thee to Him truly, and thou shalt be free from all worldly vexations, nor may any evil harm thee. . . . And such sweetness thou shalt find in His love and in His service, and have so much mirth thereof and liking in thine heart that thou wouldest not change that (state) thou livest in for to be a crowned queen. So gracious is our Lord that He wills not that His chosen be without meed here; for so much comfort is in His grace that everything fits them that they see; and though it seem to other men that they suffer hardships it grieveth them not, but seemeth to them soft, and they have more delight therein than any other hath in pleasure of the world. This, our Lord giveth them here as an earnest of the eternal meed that shall come thereafter.[2] Thus have God's friends in wonderful wise all the fruit of this world, which they have forsaken. And heaven at the end."

A remarkable passage in the *Ancren Riwle* may be compared with this. The author divided the book into eight parts, of which the subject-matter of the seventh holds out most likelihood of mystical treatment. Yet,

[1] Betake.

[2] This passage is easily applicable to the special favours of the mystic.

in Part I, made up as it is of regulations for and advice concerning the conduct of services, i.e. the Mass and the Hours, this counsel is given : "After the kiss of peace in the Mass, when the priest consecrates, forget there all the world, and there be entirely out of the body ; then, in glowing love, embrace your beloved Saviour Who is come down from heaven into your breast's bower, and hold Him fast until He shall have granted whatever you wish for." [1]

Another important point, viz. that the degree of union which can be achieved depends partly on the degree of human love and capacity of vision, is made, implicitly, at the end of a long poem, *A Moral Ode*, belonging to the thirteenth century, which is preserved in a manuscript at Jesus College, Oxford :—

> Afterwards, they may see the Lord as He certainly is,
> He only may and shall be men's and angels' bliss.
> They shall see more of Him who here loved Him more,
> And of His mercy and pity saw and knew more.

The closing argument of *Hali Meidenhad* is that since the "religious" is the spouse of God, therefore her soul's virtues — holiness, temperance, sympathy, and the rest — are spiritual offspring ; while, contrariwise, the

[1] *Ancren Riwle* (in "The King's Classics," No. 20), p. 27.

unfaithful "religious" brings forth "the devil's eldest daughter, Pride."

Then, the author emphasizes the absolute necessity for meekness, the utter incompatibility of pride with any kind or degree of goodness; e.g.: "If thou hast maidenhood meekness and mildness, God is within thine heart. But if there be contempt or any pride in it, He is an outlaw therefrom, for they cannot anyways bed in one heart; they must not dwell together in heaven. Thence, God cast her out as soon as it was born; and as she knew not by what way she came thither, so she can never more find her way there again."

The swift return from this characteristic quaint directness and humour to deep devotion is not less characteristic of our early mystics: "Preserve thyself, maiden, against her. She was born of a pure kin equal with angels: and in purest breasts she breedeth yet. The best she has beguiled,[1] and well may she who overcame an angel be victor over man. She is not (found) in clothes; nor outwardly in parti-coloured dress, though otherwhiles this is the mark and sign of her. But under white or black, and as well under grey[2] as under green and grey, she hideth in the heart. So soon as thou callest thyself better than another, be it for whatever it may be,

[1] One version reads *assailed*.

[2] i.e. under the monastic habit.

or hast contempt of any one, and thinkest unreasonably and mockingly of that which it is said another takes pride in, thou dost mar thy maidenhood, breakest thy wedlock with God, and hast offspring of His foe."

After this description of one step along the Purgative Way, there follows a moving address on the supreme value of meekness as exemplified in our Lady; and, having exhorted these anchoresses to copy that pattern, the writer adds: "A maiden in her maidenhood without meekness is as unlighted oil in a lamp." One remarkable phrase, which may surprise those who can see in the mystic nothing loftier than unintelligent emotion, deserves to be rescued from this almost forgotten treatise: "Our intellect is God's daughter."

It has been said in a recent book on mysticism in general that "the point of contact between man's life and the divine life . . . has been given many names. . . . Sometimes it is called the Synteresis, the keeper or preserver of his being; sometimes the Spark of the Soul, the Fünklein of the German mystics; sometimes its Apex, the point at which it touches the heavens. Then with a sudden flight to the other end of the symbolic scale . . . it is called the Ground of the Soul." [1] Among all these symbolic, picturesque attempts

[1] Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism*, p. 64.

to express the inexpressible, this Englishman, with that old indigenous racial knack of personifying, slips in his simple, illuminating metaphor, "our intellect is God's daughter."[1]

Some have guessed that *Hali Meidenhad* and the *Ancren Riwle* are by the same author, supposed to be either Herbert or Richard Poore, who were successively Bishops of Sarum between 1194 and 1229.[2] Cardinal Gasquet inclines to Herbert, who was translated from Sarum to Durham. Father Dalgairns in his Prefatory Essay to an edition of Walter Hilton's *Scale of Perfection* suggests that the author was a Dominican; and his theory was supported by Father Vincent McNabb, when in the *Modern Languages Review* for December, 1920, he brought forward some weighty evidence to show that a Dominican wrote it not earlier than 1230. There for the purposes of this book, whose object is less scholarship than realization and devotion, the question of authorship may be left, with this slight indication of matters of fact and of literary speculation.

Whoever wrote these books, there is, all through the *Ancren Riwle*, a strain of tender and solicitous persuasion from the priestly counsellor to the anchoresses which, centuries

[1] "ure wit is godes dohter."

[2] Preface to *Ancren Riwle*. No. 20 of "The King's Classics."

after, will remind some readers of the sermons preached by Dr. Neale to the Sisters of S. Margaret's, East Grinstead, specially those on the *Song of Songs*. Of this aspect of the *Ancren Riwle* Jusserand wrote: "His doctrine may be summed up in a word: he teaches self-renunciation. But he does it in so kindly and affectionate a tone, that the life he wishes his penitents to submit to does not seem too bitter; his voice is so sweet, that the existence he describes seems almost sweet." [1]

Hali Meidenhad presents a half-way stage between the gentle beauty of the *Ancren Riwle* and the grim pitilessness of the following stanzas, from a manuscript in the Bodleian, entitled *ubi sunt qui ante nos fuerunt*, fierce analogue in the spiritual sphere as these seem of Villon's *où sont les neiges d'antan* :—

Where be they who before us were?—
Led dogs and hawks bore,
And had fields and woods?
The rich ladies in their bower,
Who in their tresses wore gold
With their bright complexion.

They ate and drank and made them glad;
Their life was all with games led;
Before them men kneeled down;
Themselves they bore most exceedingly high,
And in the twinkling of an eye
Their souls were utterly lost.

[1] *Literary History of the English People*, vol. i, p. 212.

Where is that laughing and that song?
That trailing about and proud carriage,
The hawks and the hounds?
All that joy is gone away
That weal has come to "well-away!"
To many hard hours.

Their Paradise they enjoyed here
And now together in hell they lie
The fire it burneth ever.
Long is ever, and long is always,
Long is alas, and long is woe,
Thence they come again never.

Even in a translation with all the rime and much of the rhythm gone, this dour little poem still preserves much of its original force. If it be objected that it is absurd to compare writings for nuns with those concerning worldlings, we must remember that neither religion nor mysticism is the monopoly of the cloistered, that Mary and Martha are made of the same human stuff, and both have souls. Père Henri Bremond in his exposition of the mysticism of the great seventeenth century Jesuit, Louis Lallemant, observes: "Le père Lallemant partage donc le monde religieux en deux classes: d'une part le petit groupe des convertis, des 'intérieurs,' des 'parfaits,' des 'contemplatifs'; . . . d'autre part, les non-convertis, les médiocres." [1] But the case and condition of

[1] Henri Bremond, *Histoire Littéraire du Sentiment Religieux en France*, vol. v, p. 16.

the first small class needs further exposition, and so Père Bremond quotes the following passage from *La Doctrine Spirituelle* of Père Lallemant: "Il arrive d'ordinaire deux conversions à la plupart des saints, et aux religieux qui se rendent parfaits ; l'une par laquelle ils se dévouent au service de Dieu, l'autre par laquelle, ils se donnent entièrement à la perfection. . . . Cette seconde conversion n'arrive pas à tous les religieux, et c'est par leur négligence." [1] Yet, this division holds of the whole body of "professing" people : for there are mystics within and without Religious Orders ; and of all of us it is true, whatever our response, that we are "called to be saints."

But some of our mediaeval mystics, regarding the perfect mystical life as only possible by the way of contemplation, rather tended to conclude that its attainment was, if not exclusively, yet almost only possible for members of contemplative Orders, or for solitary contemplatives. Nevertheless, so far as men can judge, this is not true to facts, though of course mystics outside Orders, living at duty's call "in the world," must withdraw periodically from that world's bustling concerns to the peace of contemplation. Richard Rolle, in *The Form of Perfect Living*, which he wrote for Margaret

[1] op. cit., p. 15.

Kirkby (a treatise, I think, not less beautiful than the better-known *Fire of Love* and *Mending of Life*) wrote thus : " Contemplative life has two parts—a lower and a higher. The lower part is meditation of holy writing, that is God's Word, and in other good thoughts and sweet that men have of the grace of God. . . . The higher part of contemplation is beholding and yearning after the things of heaven and joy in the Holy Ghost ; that men have oft, altho' it be so that they be not praying with the mouth, but only thinking of God, and of the beauty of angels and of holy souls. Then may I say that contemplation is a wonderful joy of God's love."

Richard, whose temperament not seldom made intercourse with others a sore and painful thing, forbears to confine his " even Christians " in classes of his own making : he will rather lay before sympathetic hearers the characteristics of the Way, and the sweetness of the goal.

Walter Hilton, still more definitely, refrains from separating people into actives and contemplatives, with sage elasticity dividing our possible conditions of life into active and contemplative, thus deliberately leaving the way open for the contemplative spaces of a life spent, if need be, in the work of the active world : " These works "—i.e. the corporal and spiritual works of mercy—" though they

be but active, yet they help very much, and dispose a man in the beginning to attain afterwards to contemplation, if they be used with discretion." [1]

His definition of contemplative life stresses not the outward circumstances but the inner state of a man or woman : "Contemplative life consisteth in perfect love and charity, felt inwardly by spiritual virtues, and in a true and certain sight and knowledge of God and spiritual matters." [2]

Since there is little general knowledge of English mystics, it seems desirable to attempt some broad sketch of the fundamental aims and means of our mediaeval mystics. The only method of dealing at all effectually in a small compass with such a large body of work as is presented by all the writings mentioned on a previous page, is to treat it on some definite plan. It is impossible in a restricted space and dull in any to pass authors in review one after another. The best way will be to concentrate mainly on four matters, considering the attitude of our early mystics towards the senses, and then their handling of the special mystical states, Purgation, Illumination, and Union.

The function and scope of the five senses is a problem which, speaking broadly, divides

[1] *Scale of Perfection*, Bk. I, pt. i, ch. ii. [2] ibid., ch. iv.

psychologists into two schools—the sensationist and the intellectualist. Within this broad division there are many smaller camps, but in essence the sensationist claims that all our experience arises out of and is confined to "sense," however much rearranged, recompounded, elaborated, refined; and however far, in undergoing these processes, it may seem to become differentiated from its original sources. The intellectualists maintain, on the other hand, that in experience there is an element which is "extra-sensuous." As Professor Michael Maher, S.J., has written: "By affirming the existence of a faculty specifically distinct from that of sense, we mean to hold that the mind possesses the power of performing operations beyond the scope of sense." [1]

It is generally a wise precaution to drive home a philosophical plea with a concrete illustration. Not a bad instance of this "power of performing operations beyond the scope of sense" may be found in the apprehension of the relation between two objects. The senses—sight, touch, and the rest—can bring before me the accumulation of qualities belonging respectively, let us say, to a carrot and to a parsnip. All that perception of colour, shape, texture, taste, odour, etc., can resolve

[1] *Psychology*, Stonyhurst Manuals of Philosophy, p. 231.

itself into this or that sensation ; but my conception of their particular relation which we call likeness or unlikeness, together with the exact degree of this, cannot be "given in sense" ; it is intellectual. No one can hold that there exists some concrete entity—viz. the precise difference between a carrot and a parsnip—which entity stimulates my senses, as the carrot does in this way and the parsnip in that.

Reflection on our inner states, e.g. on some problem of "honour," is another instance of "extra-sensual" experience. No "moral" experience has a basis of "sense."

This deep dividing line which goes to the very bottom of philosophy could not but be obvious to the mystics. Equally unmistakable to them was the strange power of the senses. To the whole problem our mystics adopted a singularly balanced, sagacious, and wholesome attitude. Perceiving that if the five senses be not the sole sources and instruments of human experience they still play an exceedingly important part in it, adding too an element of subtle danger difficult to gauge, they asked themselves less What is their source? than the more practical question, What is to be done with them? The distinction between inner and outer, between the life of the body with its five senses and that of the spirit, is clearly announced by the author of

the *Ancren Riwle*: "We are to treat of the theological law, the rules of which are two: the one relates to the right conduct of the heart; the other to the regulation of the outward life." [1] And again, still more explicitly: "Ye should by all means, with all your might, and all your strength, keep well the inward rule, and for its sake the outward. The inward rule is always alike. The outward is various, because every one ought so to observe the outward rule as that the body may therewith best serve the inward." [2]

Here the spiritual and the sense-life are not only differentiated, but the latter is deliberately subordinated to the former.

The interesting fact remains that this counsellor forbids the anchoresses to *promise* absolutely that they will keep the external rule: "The inward . . . rule is framed not by man's contrivance, but by the command of God. Therefore it ever is and shall be the same, without mixture and without change; and all men ought ever invariably to observe it. But all men cannot, nor need they nor ought they to keep the outward rule in the same unvaried manner. . . . The external rule, which I called the handmaid, is of man's contrivance; nor is it instituted for anything else but to serve the internal law. . . . Wherefore

[1] *Ancren Riwle*, No. 20 in "The King's Classics," p. 1.
[2] ibid., p. 3.

this rule may be changed and varied according to every one's state and circumstances. . . . No anchorite, by my advice, shall make profession, that is vow to keep anything as commanded, except those things, that is obedience, chastity, and constancy as to her abode . . . for whoso undertaketh anything, and promises to God to do it as His command, bindeth herself thereto and sinneth mortally in breaking it, if she break it wilfully and intentionally. . . . Therefore, my dear sisters, that which I shall write to you in the first and especially in the last part of your book, you should not vow it but keep it in your heart and perform it as though you had vowed it." [1]

The eighth and last part of the book opens with a reminder of the above advice : " I said before at the commencement, that ye ought not, like unwise people, to promise to keep any of the external rules. I say the same still, nor do I write them for any but you alone." [2]

The author of the *Riwle* devotes Part II of the book to the subject of *Keeping the Heart* : and here the importance attached to the five senses as contributors to, or enemies of, the spiritual life is clearly shown by the fact that this section consists of five chapters—Of

[1] pp. 4–7. [2] p. 212.

Sight ; of Tasting (including speech as a function of the mouth) ; of Hearing ; of Smell ; of Touch. At the outset, the author writes : "The wardens of the heart are the five senses : sight, hearing, taste, smelling, and every member's feeling ; and we shall speak of them all, for whosoever guards these well doth Solomon's command. He keepeth well his heart and the health of his soul." [1]

The following are typical passages from the chapter on sight. Commenting upon Eve's fall, he warns his readers "that thus did sight go before and prepare the way for guilty desire." [2] A few pages further on he quotes from and elaborates S. Bernard : "'As death came,' says S. Bernard, 'into the world through sin, so through eye-windows death hath his entrance into the soul.' Lord Christ ! how men would shut fast every aperture ! Wherefore ? That they might shut out death—death of carnal life : and will not an anchorite stop up her eye-windows, against death of hell and of the soul ? And with good right may eye-windows be called evil windows, for they have done much evil to many an anchorite." [3]

In striking fashion he glosses a passage from Job : "What do men think with eyes ? God knows it full well, for after the eye comes the thought, and then the deed." [4] Jeremiah he

[1] ibid., p. 39. [2] p. 42. [3] p. 49.
[4] Job xxxi. 1.

credits with a telling phrase: "Alas, mine eyes have robbed all my soul." [1]

Of the second sense, taste, the author says but little, and even that little is relegated to Part VIII, the last in the book, where he deals with the external rule. Taste, so he directs, is to be mortified in two ways, first by regulation of quantity: "Ye shall eat twice every day from Easter until the Holy Rood day, the later which is in harvest, except on Fridays and Ember Days, and procession days and vigils. In those days and in the Advent, ye shall not eat anything white, except necessity require it. The other half year ye shall fast always, except only on Sunday." [2] Secondly, taste was to be disciplined by the kind and quality of the food eaten: "Ye shall eat no flesh nor lard except in great sickness; or whosoever is infirm may eat pottage without scruple; and accustom yourselves to little drink. Nevertheless, dear sisters, your meat and your drink have seemed to me less than I would have it. Fast no day upon bread and water, except ye have leave. There are anchoresses who make their meals with their friends outside the convent. That is too much friendship. . . . Make ye no

[1] *Pepigi foedus cum oculis meis ut ne cogitarem quidem de virgine.* The Vulgate version is given as that, up to the Reformation, was the text of the Western Church.

[2] *Ancren Riwle*, p. 313.

banquetings, nor encourage any strange vagabond fellows to come to the gate; though no other evil come of it than their immoderate talking, it might sometimes prevent heavenly thoughts." [1]

Such passages as these make the severity of the *Riwle* obvious. Elsewhere their director still more expressly and forcibly forbids the indulgence of taste: "Anchoresses . . . ought never more to grumble on account of either meat or drink, be it never so stale; if it may be eaten, let her eat and devoutly thank God for it, and if it may not, let her grieve that she must ask for more palatable food. But rather than that asking should give rise to any offence, she ought to die, as a martyr, in her discomfort." [2]

But there is some one besides the anchoresses to be considered! This kindly director, through his anxiety to save them from worldly complications, forbade them to keep cattle or to carry on any traffic; still he genially made an exception: "Ye shall not possess any beast, my dear sister, but a cat one." He would perhaps forgive a question which will force itself; with such a menu, what did the poor cat eat, especially on the days when even fish was banned?

However, to the author of the *Riwle* taste is not the main *sense* in the mouth. Oddly, he calls the tongue a sense, and in his emphasis

[1] ibid., pp. 313, 314. [2] p. 81.

on the harmfulness of talk, he loses sight almost of taste.

First he forbids *much* talking. This passage is such an excellent instance of his constant mingling of delicate humour with genuine spiritual insight that it shall be quoted whole: "Eve, in Paradise, held a long conversation with the serpent, and told him all the lesson that God had taught her and Adam concerning the apple; and thus the fiend, by her talk, understood at once her weakness, and found out the way to ruin her. Our Lady S. Mary acted in a quite different manner. She told the angel no tale, but asked him briefly that which she wanted to know. Do you, my dear sisters, imitate our Lady, and not the cackling Eve. Wherefore, let an anchoress, whatsoever she be, keep silence as much as ever she can and may. Let her not have the hen's nature. When the hen has laid, she must needs cackle. And what does she get by it? Straightway comes the chough and robs her of her eggs and devours all that of which she should have brought forth her live birds. And just so, the wicked chough, the devil, beareth away from the cackling anchoresses, and swalloweth up all the goods they have brought forth, and which ought, as birds, to bear them up towards heaven, if it had not been cackled." [1]

[1] pp. 51–2.

He then proceeds to condemn all idle talk. "'What is holy conversation?' as S. Anselm saith. She grinds grit who prates idly. The two cheeks are the two grind-stones, the tongue is the clapper. Look, dear sister, that your cheeks never grind anything but soul-food, nor your ears hear anything but soul-heal; and shut not only your ears but your eye-windows against idle conversation." [1] As a matter of course, he forbids bad language,[2] and then concludes the whole matter with Seneca's advice, "I will that you speak seldom, and then but little." [3] For, as he truly says, in a picturesque phrase which recalls many a saying of Rolle, "with the flitting word the soul flits away." [4]

His warning against an occasional silence which will afterwards compensate itself with a flood of words is quaintly direct, and filled with penetrating insight into our dismal human ways: "Many keep in their words to let more out, as men do water at the mill-dam, and so did Job's friends that were to comfort him; they sat still full seven nights; but when they had all begun to speak they never knew how to stop their importunate tongues." [5] Here the translator spoils the original Middle English, which is *þeone kuð heo neþere astunten hore cleppe*. 'Stop their importunate tongues' loses

[1] ibid., p. 55. [2] p. 55. [3] p. 56. [4] p. 58. [5] p. 56.

the sound suggestion in the closing words ; *muffle their clacking* is the idea, *astunten* being derived from the old verb to blunt or dull a thing.

Finally, the author divides evil speech into *poisonous*, which includes heresy, *deliberate lying*, *backbiting*, and *flattery*, and into *foul* speech, the latter covering all uncleanly and idle conversation and utterance. Of the first he writes—and we may well wish it were still true : "Heresy, God be thanked, prevaileth not in England." [1] Of lying he says : "Lying is so evil a thing that S. Austin saith, 'That thou shouldest not tell a lie to shield thy father from death.'" [2] Backbiters and flatterers he dismisses contemptuously as the "devil's dustmen." [3]

Having written so much about speech, he sums up his advice about listening in one weighty passage : "Now, my dear sisters, keep your ears far from all evil speaking, which is thus threefold — idle, foul, and venomous. People say of anchoresses that almost every one hath an old woman to feed her ears ; a prating gossip who tells her all the tales of the land ; a magpie who chatters to her of everything she sees or hears ; so that it is a common saying, 'From miln [4] and from market, from smithy and

[1] p. 63. [2] p. 63. [3] p. 64. [4] Mill.

from nunnery, men bring tidings.' Christ knows this is a sad tale; that a nunnery, which should be the most solitary place of all, should be evened to those very three places in which there is most idle discourse. But would to God, dear sisters, that all the others were as free as ye are of such folly." [1]

Of the fourth sense, smell, he quaintly suggests that "sometimes the fiend maketh something to stink that ye ought to use, because he would have you to avoid it; and at other times the deceiver maketh a sweet smell to come . . . in order that ye may think that God, on account of your holy life, sends you His grace and His comfort, and so think well of yourselves and become proud." [2]

Lastly, he deals with touch, which he extends to sensation "throughout the whole body." He urges that just because it affects the whole person it should be specially guarded: "Our Lord knew it well, and therefore He chose to endure most suffering in that sense, to comfort us if we suffer pain therein. . . . Our Lord in this sense had pain, not in one place only but in all, not only over all His Body, but inwardly in His blessed Soul." [3]

To these closing words a modern psychologist might take exception, unless he were of the many who resolve all human experience

[1] *Ancren Riwle*, p. 67. [2] ibid., p. 79. [3] p. 83.

ultimately into sense effects. Having pointed out that pain is sharper where the flesh is more quick, he continues: "A little hurt in the eye giveth more pain than a great one in the heel, for the flesh is less quick there;" [1] and concludes the matter of touch thus: "Thus was Jesus Christ, the Almighty God, sorely pained in all His five senses, and particularly in the last, that is feeling. For His flesh was all as quick as the tender eyes; and you guard this sense, that is bodily feeling, more carefully than all the other senses. God's hands were nailed to the Cross. By those nails, I entreat you anchoresses—not you but others, for there is no need, my dear sisters—keep your hands within your windows." [2]

As a general counsel to those who fancy that they have their senses well under control, this scrap of penetrating observation, endorsed by time-long experience, may not come amiss: "Many a man thinketh that he doeth that well which he doeth very ill." [3]

This disquisition in the *Ancren Riwle* on the senses is, so far as I know, the most complete to be found in Middle English, though no mystical writer of the time omits them altogether. At less length than the author of the *Riwle*, but with recurring persistence, Richard

[1] p. 84. [2] p. 87. [3] p. 56.

Rolle emphasizes the dangers inherent in the senses by insisting on the importance of staying away from the haunts of men : "Three manners of occupations there are : as various and much brawling, raking about, and much caring for earthly things." [1]

Rolle condemns the second of these as a deliberate indulgence of the senses : "those who are ever raking about to feed their wits." [2]

In the third part of *Our Daily Work*, which we should remember was written, not like *The Form of Perfect Living* for "religious," but for "every man" (p. 83), for "every lover of God" (p. 157), he utters emphatic warning against this roving and straying: "The men who will nowhere rest but aye rake about ; their eyes see many things that the eye sends to the heart, and such come not out easily when they are once imprinted. S. Bernard complains of the harms which he felt in the world while he was therein, and says 'the world surrounded me and weighed me down.'" [3]

Some critics over-insist on the debt which English mystics owe to men of other nations, S. Bernard, Hugh of S. Victor, and the rest. This passage is an excellent instance of the racial savour of our mysticism, the quotation

[1] *Our Daily Work*, p. 96 of *The Form of Perfect Living*, rendered into modern English by Geraldine E. Hodgson.
[2] ibid., p. 97. [3] ibid., p. 157.

from S. Bernard being but a peg on which Rolle will hang his so English and humorous view: "S. Bernard says . . . 'The world surrounded me and weighed me down,' that is, The world has besieged me on every side; and through the gates of my five wits it shot at and wounded me full sore; and through the wounds death presses in to slay my sorry soul. Mine eyes look, my thought changes and kindles me in sin. Mine ears hear and my heart bows me thereto. I smell with nose and it pleases my thoughts. With my mouth I speak, and in my speech I please or beguile others; and, with a little over-soft feeling, lust kindles in my flesh, and the fiend, my foe, whom I cannot see, stands ever against me with his bow bent." [1]

That is not S. Bernard's mode of thought, nor the product of any Latin mind; it springs out of Rolle's own experience; it is English in its grim humour, in its direct simplicity, English down to the devil's weapon, which to a man of Rolle's day must be an ashen bow.

The danger lurking in our "five wits" is perpetually present to his mind: "When thou hast gathered home the heart and its wits, and hast destroyed the things which might hinder thee from praying, and won to that devotion which God sends to thee, through

[1] ibid., p. 158.

His dear-worthy grace, quickly rise from thy bed at the bell-ringing."[1] Again: "After meat, be thou worthy and keep thee from much speech and idle games, and hold thy wits inward, in fear of God."[2]

The stumbling-blocks which these "five wits" put in the path of the spiritual life Rolle dwells on with a self-revealing sigh, which steals down the intervening years: "Cleanness of heart three things keep: one is watchful thought and stable about God. Another is care to keep thy five wits, so that all the wicked stirrings of them be closed out of the flesh. The third, honest and profitable occupation."[3] And yet once again: "Many things hinder thee in toiling to pray: weariness of limbs; men thou meetest who speak to thee; then, thy five wits fleet out of ward, and then the devotion of him who prays cools."[4]

Space will not allow of quotations about the senses from all our mystics, but the anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* should not, I think, be omitted. In his forty-eighth chapter he deals with the problem how God will be served both with body and soul, and with his customary urbanity he handles the senses less severely than Rolle; thus, he writes of "those sounds and those sweetnesses that

[1] ibid., p. 116. [2] p. 144.
[3] *The Form of Perfect Living*, p. 36.
[4] *Our Daily Work*, p. 161.

come in by the windows of thy wits, the which may be both good and evil." [1] Though he insists that "all bodily thing is subject unto ghostly thing," [2] yet by a lively image he shows how "Brother Ass" may not only serve but, as it were, strike the right visible attitude for the invisible soul, a point of view which rather suggests the humanity of S. Francis than the austerer standpoint of fourteenth-century England in this matter: "What time that a soul disposeth him effectually to this work, then as fast suddenly, unwitting himself that worketh, the body that peradventure before ere he began was somewhat bent downwards, on one side or on other for ease of the flesh, shall set it" (i.e. itself) "upright: following in manner and in likeness bodily the work of the spirit that is made ghostly. And thus it is most seemly to be." [3]

It is worth noting, as the view is somewhat unusual, that this writer regards sensuality as rooted in something deeper than the bodily senses: "Sensuality is a power of our soul, recking and reigning in the bodily wits, through the which we have bodily knowing and feeling of all bodily creatures, whether they be pleasing or unpleasing;" [4] a passage, one would

[1] *The Cloud of Unknowing*, edited by Evelyn Underhill, p. 227.

[2] ibid., p. 270. [3] p. 270. [4] p. 282.

suppose, calculated to startle the modern sensationist school.

His too is the delightful passage, one of the quaintest to be found in English, about the possibility of diabolical deception: "Some of these men the devil will deceive full wonderfully. For he will send a manner of dew, angels' food they ween it to be, as it were coming out of the air, and softly and sweetly falling in their mouths, and therefore they have it in custom to sit gaping as they would catch flies. . . . Ofttimes the devil feigneth quaint sounds in their ears, quaint lights and shining in their eyes, and wonderful smells in their noses: but all is but falsehood."[1]

Walter Hilton takes a middle line between the severity of the *Ancren Riwle* and Rolle and the tolerant humour of the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*. Writing rather comprehensively and vaguely of "any other thing that may be felt by bodily sense," Hilton declares that all such manner of feeling may be good, wrought by a good angel, and they may be deceivable, wrought by a wicked angel, *when he transfigureth himself into an angel of light*."[2] But he strikes a fresh note, not sounded by the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, when he quickly adds, "Wherefore,

[1] ibid., p. 255.

[2] *The Scale of Perfection*, Bk. I, pt. i, ch. x.

since they may be both good and evil, it appeareth they are not the best."[1]

Though he thus stands in the middle way, occasionally he inclines towards the sterner view of Rolle and those who dread the senses' dangerousness: "The prophet saith 'Death cometh in by our windows.'[2] These are the five senses by which thy soul goeth out of herself, also fetcheth her delight and seeketh her feeding in earthly things, contrary to the nobility of her own nature."[3] Then by a quaint exposition of the Parable of the Great Supper Hilton explains "when the use of thy senses be deadly sin and when venial. Thus, therefore, our Lord saith in the Gospel: *A man made a great supper, and called many thereto, and sent his servant at supper time after them that were bidden. The first excused himself, and said on this wise, that he could not come, for he had bought a farm. The other also excused himself that he could not come for he had bought five yoke of oxen, and went to try them. The third for that he had married a wife.* I forbear to speak of the first and of the last, but will tell you *of the middlemost of them*, that had bought the oxen, for he is to our purpose. Five yoke of oxen betoken the

[1] ibid.

[2] "Quia ascendit mors per fenestras nostras."—*Jer.* ix. 21.

[3] *The Scale of Perfection*, Bk. I, pt. iii, ch. ix.

five senses, which are beastly [1] as an ox. Now, this man that was called to the supper was not rejected because he bought the oxen, but because he went to try them, and so he would not come. Right so I say to thee ; for to have thy senses, and to use them in need, it is no sin ; but if thou go voluntarily to try them by vain delights in creatures, then it is sin." [2]

This may not be quite authority's exegesis, but it shows, with nice precision, Hilton's attitude to the senses.

The view of Margery Kempe of Lynn again differs slightly from the others. She confesses that she had a struggle to conquer the natural impulses of sense : " Our merciful Lord Jesu Christ drew this creature unto His love, and to the mind of His passion, that she might not endure to behold a leper, or another sick man, specially if he had any wounds appearing on him. So she wept as if she had seen our Lord Jesu with His wounds bleeding ; and so she did in the sight of the soul ; for through the beholding of the sick man, her mind was all ravished in to our Lord Jesu, that she had great mourning and sorrowing that she might not kiss the leper when she met them in the way, for the love of our Lord which was all contrary to her disposition in the years of her

[1] Used in the word's primary sense, of animal nature.

[2] *The Scale of Perfection*, Bk. I, pt. iii, ch. ix.

youth and prosperity, for then she abhorred them most." [1]

Her peculiar contribution to this question of the senses is her recognition that they, whether in themselves good or bad, are only in the outer court of mystical life, and her insistence that the real battle-ground is in the soul, that the real enemy is not the senses but the will. Naturally, then, she concentrates on the inner state: "Daughter, if thou wear the habergeon or the hair, fasting bread and water, and if thou saidest every day a thousand *Pater Nosters*, thou shalt not please Me so well as thou dost when thou art in silence, and suffrest Me to speak in thy soul.

"Daughter, for to bid many beads, it is good to them that can no better do, and yet it is not perfect. But it is a good way towards perfection. For, I tell thee, daughter, they that be great fasters, and great doers of penance, they would that it should be holden the best life. And they that give them unto many devotions, they would have that the best life. And those that give much almesse, they would that it were holden the best life. And I have often told thee, daughter, that thinking and weeping and high contemplation is the best life on earth, and thou shalt

[1] Short *Treatise of Contemplation*, modernized in *The Cell of Self-Knowledge*, edited by Edmund Gardner, p. 55.

have more merit in heaven for one year thinking in thy mind than for an hundred year of praying with thy mouth, and yet thou wilt not believe Me, for thou wilt bid many beads." [1]

Trite and old as the fact is, we are reminded in this passage how self-love and the spirit of envious competition can dwell in dedicated hearts, and spoil the holiest acts ; and we may well recall that passage in S. Teresa's Relation of Favours accorded to her at Toledo during the year 1576 : "Once when I was grieving over being obliged to eat meat, and do no penance, I heard it said that sometimes there was more of self-love than desire of penance in such sorrow." [2]

From these various discourses on the danger, and the necessary training of the senses, one clear fact emerges, that while we linger in the region of sense, we are only standing on the threshold of mystical life proper. All this careful instruction is required ; but, when all is said and done, it deals only with the instruments and methods which are required to clear the ground for that first hard step on the Mystical Way, *Purgation.*

All the same, since, alike to the "religious" and to those whose life must be spent in the world, body and soul are indissolubly knit

[1] ibid., pp. 52–3.

[2] *Letters of S. Teresa*, vol. ii, p. 92 (Benedictine Edition).

together in time, the weakness of the former, its liability with many of us to disabling pain, its temptations, its cowardice, its lapses must always remain as an only too possible and recurring danger. There is a sense, as Margery Kempe holds, in which bodily faculties belong to the outer court, but their capacity, even after years of restraint and discipline, to spring into life again is only too terribly real; moreover, the subtler their power the more likelihood is there that through the long stages of purgation the struggle against them will be incessant. So true is this, that no one can be surprised if Rolle and the author of the *Ancren Riwle* regard them as a vital part of all that which must be purged clean away.

CHAPTER III

The Mystic Way in the Middle Ages

ROLLE is not only the most prolific, but, on the whole, the most comprehensive of that little group of mystics who adorned the English fourteenth century; in his works we have not only the first systematic but the most complete presentment of mystical life in the English tongue.

In the Library of Lincoln Cathedral there still remains the Latin Office of S. Richard the Hermit, to be used in public when he shall have been canonized by the Church. This document sets forth that he was born at Thornton, in Yorkshire, was sent to Oxford by Thomas Neville, then Archdeacon of Durham, whence being already, in his nineteenth year, obsessed by the uncertainty of this mortal life, and burdened with the miserable and undeniable reality of sin, he returned home. Begging of his sister a white and a grey garment, he added thereto his father's old rain-hood, fashioning from these unpromising materials the best habit he could.

Clothed so, he wandered, on the Vigil of

the Assumption, into a church, possibly Topcliffe, near Ripon. On the Feast he assisted at Mass, and, with the parish priest's permission, went into the pulpit to preach the sermon, which discourse reduced the "multitude of his hearers" to a compunction which showed itself in unrestrainable tears.

A little later on Sir John Dalton, to whose notice the young man had been brought, provided him with a suitable habit, a cell, and meagre maintenance. So great was his devotional absorption that men could remove, mend, and put on him again his ragged habit, while he remained unaware alike of them and of their doings. He became a roving hermit, and in his journeys made acquaintance with the anchoress, Dame Margaret Kirkby, whose cell was at Anderby, near Richmond, in Yorkshire. By his ministrations he healed her of physical disease. A spiritual friendship ensued, in which, possibly, she was the greater benefactor, by soothing his intense oversensitiveness, which often caused him bitter suffering at the hands of an obtuse unillumined world. Years after, by the return of her disease, Margaret inferred truly that, unknown to her as the fact was, Richard had died.

The longest of Rolle's writings are *The Mending of Life*; *The Fire of Love*; *The Form of Perfect Living*; and *Our Daily Work*. In the first of these he sets forth the doctrine

of Purgation. Some one may ask What first set him on this track?—since no one sets out *in vacuo* on any quest, some sufficient reason must impel each one of us to start. The answer is, a rare devotion to our Lord.

In one of his shorter prose works this wonderful outburst of devoted love occurs: "I cannot pray nor meditate save in sounding the Name of Jesus: I savour not joy that is not mingled with Jesus. Wheresoever I be, wheresoever I sit, the remembrance of the savour of Jesus departs out from my mind. I have fixed my mind: I have set it as a token upon my arm: for love is as strong as death. As death slays all, so love overcomes all. Everlasting love has overcome me, not to slay but to quicken me. But it has wounded that it may heal me. It has pierced through my heart that it may be the mirthlier healed.[1] . . .

[1] The same view recurs in English literature five and a half centuries later:—

Naked I wait Thy love's uplifted stroke!
My harness piece by piece Thou hast hewn from me,
And smitten me to my knee;
I am defenceless utterly.

. . . . .

All which I took from thee I did but take
Not for thy harms
But just that thou mightst seek it in My arms.
All which thy child's mistake
Fancies as lost, I have stored for thee at home!
Rise, clasp My hand, and come!

The Name of Jesus has taught me to sing, and has lighted my mind with the heat of unmade [1] light. Therefore, I sit and cry, Who shall show to Thee, beloved Jesus, that I languish for love? My flesh has failed and my heart melts in love, yearning for Jesus. All the heart fastened in yearning for Jesus is turned into the fire of love, and with the sweetness of the Godhead fully is it filled." [2]

The date of this is unknown, but though it looks like the rapture of one far on the Mystical Way, yet the germ of such devotion must have been the impelling force of Rolle's youth.

As we turn the pages of this short eulogy, one of the most beautiful and self-revealing, as it is, of all Rolle's voluminous works, we find, following closely upon this lyrical outpouring of adoration, his recognition of the absolute necessity of a previous purgation: "I went about by covetousness of wealth and I found not Jesus. I ran by wantonness of the flesh and I found not Jesus. I sat in companies of worldly mirth and I found not Jesus. In all these, I sought Jesus and I found Him not, for by His grace He let me know that He is not found in the land of softly living. Therefore, I turned by another

[1] uncreated.

[2] *Praise of the Name of Jesus* (Thornton MS.), published in Library of Early English Writers, edited by Horstman, vol. i, pp. 186, 187.

way : and I ran about by poverty and I found Jesus, pure-born into the world and laid in a Crib, and lapped in cloths. I went by suffering of weariness and I found Jesus weary in the way, tormented with hunger, thirst, and cold, filled with reproofs and blame. I sat by myself, fleeing from the world's vanities, and I found Jesus fasting in the desert, lonely in the mountain praying. I ran by the pain of penance, and I found Jesus bound, scourged, given gall to drink, nailed to the cross, hanging on the cross, and dying on the cross. Therefore Jesus is not found in wealth but in poverty, not in pleasures but in penance, not in wanton enjoyment but in bitter weeping, not among the multitude but in loneliness." [1]

Our English mystics, while bowing in adoration before our Lord's divinity, never, on the opposite side, fell into the Apollinarian heresy, which deprived Him of the rational human spirit—"the seat of self-consciousness and self-determination." [2] The fourteenth century showed no inclination to minimize our Lord's human sufferings—hunger, thirst, the pain of undeserved blame, loneliness, and the dolour of wounds. This same Thornton MS. contains a translation which some have ascribed to Rolle, of the Seraphic Doctor's *Meditations on the Life of Christ.* In that for

[1] *Praise of the Name of Jesus*, op. cit., p. 190.
[2] *Catholic Encyclopaedia*, vol. i, p. 615.

None, on the Seven Words from the Cross, S. Bonaventura dwells emphatically on the *reality* of our Lord's suffering in His humanity: "*I thirst*: He thirsted bodily and that was no wonder, for through shedding of His precious blood so abundantly: and for the great anguish which He suffered without ceasing from the Thursday at even to the Friday at high noon. He was all inwardly dry and thirsty."

In *The Mending of Life* Rolle urges the necessity of detachment from all worldly surroundings, of voluntary purgation as the necessary first step, though the passage I have quoted above throbs with a passion of ecstatic love hardly to be found in *The Mending*: "Truly, he that desires to love Christ truly, not only without heaviness, but with a joy unmeasured, he casts away all things that may let him. And in this case he spares neither father nor mother nor himself; he receives no man's cheer; he does violence to all his hinderers, and he breaks through all obstacles. Whatsoever he can do seems little to him so that he may love God." [1]

Again he writes: "Take heed also; to seek more than enough is foul covetousness; to keep back necessaries is frailty, but to forsake all things is perfectness." [2]

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[1] *The Mending of Life*, ch. i. [2] ibid., ch. iii.

Now detachment is not a cause but an effect. Rolle, while never denying the danger which lurks in the senses, puts his finger on the very core of the process called purgation, viz. on the will. "There are three sins, or three kinds of sin; that is to say of thought, of mouth, and of work." [1] "Truly," so he warns us, "abstinence, by itself, is not holiness." Then he sums up this business of purging, not the external manifestation, but the inner spring of daily life and conduct: "If thou be a pilgrim and rest by the way, whatever thou dost in this life, to God have an eye. Let not thy thoughts go from Him; think that time lost in which thou thinkest not of God. . . . See that thou flow not with vain thoughts, nor give thyself to superfluous cares, but study to get and hold the steadfastness of mind so that thou dread not the wretchedness of this world, nor desire the goods thereof unmannerly. He that dreads to suffer adversity knows not yet how it behoves us to despise the world; and he that joys in earthly things is far from everlasting things." [2]

"Study to get and hold the steadfastness of mind." We can scarcely fail to recall those wonderful words of Sir Thomas Browne: "Therefore, while so many think it the only valour to command and master others, study

[1] ibid., ch. iv. [2] ch. iv.

thou the dominion of thyself and quiet thine own commotions."

A subdued will and clean thoughts Rolle absolutely demands as one essential outcome of purgation: "Abraham, when he made a sacrifice to God, fowls of the air lighted thereon, and would have defiled it; and he cleared those birds away, so that none durst come nigh it, till all the time were passed, and the sacrifice made. Let us do so with these flying thoughts, which defile the sacrifice or our prayers. This sacrifice is agreeable to God when it comes from a clean and loving heart." [1]

Similar insistence on the fact that purgation is, and in the last resort must be, inward, though external means are "helply to get this," is to be found in *The Epistle of Prayer*, generally attributed to the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*: "And ofttimes, unknowing maketh men to charge more and commend more bodily exercise (as is fasting, waking, sharp-wearing and all these others) than they do ghostly exercise in virtues and in this reverent affection touched before." [2]

The attitude of the utterly surrendered will is shown clearly in a later passage: "Chaste love is that when thou askest of God neither

[1] *Our Daily Work.*

[2] *The Epistle of Prayer* (published in *The Cell of Self-Knowledge*), p. 82.

releasing of pain, nor increasing of meed, nor yet sweetness in His love in this life, but if it be any certain time that thou covetest sweetness as for a refreshing of thy ghostly mights, that they fail not in the way : but thou askest of God naught but Himself, and neither thou reckest nor lookest after whether thou shalt be in pain or in bliss, so that thou have Him that thou lovest—this is chaste love, this is perfect love." [1]

Some people seem to imagine that mysticism is nothing but a drifting along on a suave current of pleasant emotionalism ; others gauge their religious state by their "feelings." But one and all the great mystics, in this phrase or that, whatever their race or their era, insist on the truth that love which has surrendered its will recks not of pain or bliss. S. Teresa, many generations later, was as emphatic on this point as the writer of *The Epistle of Prayer* : "We set so high a price on our heart ! We are so slow to give God the absolute gift of our own self. . . . Let everyone realize that real love of God does not consist in tear-shedding, nor in that sweetness and tenderness for which usually we long, just because they console us, but in serving God in justice, fortitude of soul, and humility." [2]

These words were written by a woman who

[1] ibid., p. 86. [2] S. Teresa's *Autobiography*, ch. xi.

had counted the cost, and who never exaggerated.

Undoubtedly Rolle suffered great trials in the Purgative Way: "When the fiend sees one man out of thousands perfectly turned to God, following the steps of Christ, despising this present world; loving and seeking only the things unseen; taking perfect penance; and purging himself from all filth of mind and body; he reparels [1] a thousand beguilings of annoyance and a thousand crafts of fighting to cast him from the love of God to the love of the world, and to fill him again with the filth of sin."

It is hard to believe that this passage did not spring out of frequent personal experience. We must remember that it is only of late years that the study, apart from the practice, of mysticism has grown to be an important matter. Though Walter Hilton hinted that he personally wrote of it rather as a spectator than an actor, that attitude was uncommon in the fourteenth century. On the contrary, today not a few people write about it; but always a difference is discernible between those whose knowledge is immediate and those who write of it because, for one reason or another, they have come to take interest in it.

Rolle did not leave his difficulties to be

[1] i.e. contrives. *The Mending of Life*, ch. v.

a question of speculation or inference. In *The Fire of Love* he lets us into the secret of one of his sorest temptations, one natural, indeed inevitable, to so thin-skinned, irritable a mortal: "This have I known, that the more men have raved against me with words of backbiting, so mickle the more I have grown in ghostly profit. Forsooth, the worst backbiters I have had are those which I trusted before as faithful friends. Yet I ceased not for their words from those things that were profitable to my soul; truly I used more study, and ever I found God favourable. I called to mind what was written, *Maledicent illi et tu benedicas*, that is to say, 'They shall curse him, and Thou shalt bless.' And in process of time great profit in ghostly joy was given me."[1]

Not the least part of Rolle's vivid charm arose out of this quality which brought him such sharp, recurring pain; for his sensitive and quick response of body and soul to his surroundings, which necessarily forced him to suffer through the various untoward manners and doings of some of his neighbours, was equally lively and swift in the case of pleasanter people. Yet with all his reiterated insistence on the necessity for purgation, and his manifold efforts to achieve it, Rolle was not deceived. The

[1] *The Fire of Love*, ch. xiv.

danger of falling back again was ever before his eyes. He enumerates the "nine degrees" of turning to God, viz. conversion, despising the world, embracing poverty, right direction of life, enduring tribulation, patience, prayer, meditation, and good reading; and then he explains that "By these nine degrees . . . man comes to cleanness of mind where God is seen.[1] Cleanness, I say, that may be had in this life." [2]

Then follows the warning: "Who may truly say, 'I am clean from sin'? Truly none in this life. . . . What cleanness, therefore, can man have in this life? Truly worthy and great if he rightly use himself in the study of reading, prayer, and meditation. . . . The virtue, therefore, of a cleaned soul is to have the mind busy to God, for in this degree all the thought is dressed to Christ: all the mind, although he *seems* to speak to others, is spread unto Him. Truly, in a clean conscience nothing is bitter, sharp, or hard, but all is sweet and lovely. Out of cleanness of heart rises a song of joy, sweet ditty and joyful mirth. . . . I spare to say more here, for I seem to myself a full great wretch. For oft my flesh is noyed and assayed." [3]

Well might S. John of the Cross call such

[1] "Beati mundo corde, quoniam ipsi Deum videbunt."—*S. Matt.* v. 8.

[2] *The Mending of Life*, ch. x. [3] ibid.

perpetual uncertain strife "this arid purgation" ; though the actual phrase does not slip off Rolle's pen, the fact it covers was always with him.

No one, surely, could read this frank confession without sympathy for so intense and sincere a sense of unworthiness. Only the hypersensitively irritable can wholly realize the temperamental obstacles which beset a man of Rolle's nature, anxious as he was, all the while, to give no occasion of scandal, or can understand what temptation to despair lurks at times in such a temper ; for, after all, to feel purgation hard and arid is to prove its incomplete consummation, its verging on failure, as Walter Hilton hints plainly enough : "Many a man hath the virtues of humility, patience, and charity to his neighbours, and such other only in his reason and will, and hath no spiritual delight, nor love in them ; for ofttimes he feeleth grudging heaviness and bitterness for to do them, and yet nevertheless he doth them, but 'tis only by stirring of reason for dread of God. This man hath these virtues in reason and will, but not the love of them in affection. But when by the grace of Jesus and by ghostly and bodily exercise reason is turned into light and will into love, then hath he virtues in affection ; for he hath so well gnawn on the bitter bark or shell of the nut that at length he hath

broken it and now feeds on the kernel ; that is to say, the virtues which were first heavy for to practise are now turned into a very delight and savour."[1] Perhaps the difference between the dull doing of duty in those dour hours of suffering when a man can only just keep hold on the very tail of his patience, and the serene acceptance of pain by the mystically purged, has never been more beautifully expressed : "reason is turned into light and will into love."

And so we learn once more that the atmosphere of mystical life is love. Yet the end of the matter is not here. Love is not only the atmosphere, but an actual instrument of knowledge : "All reasonable creatures, angels and man, have in them, each one by himself, one principal working power, the which is called a knowledgeable power, and another principal working power, the which is called a loving power. Of the which two powers, to the first, the which is a knowledgeable power, God, that is the maker of them, is evermore incomprehensible ; and to the second, which is the loving power, in each one diversely, He is all comprehensible to the full."[2]

This fact, thus succinctly stated by an unknown writer, is common property of all the

[1] *The Scale of Perfection*, Bk. I, pt. i, ch. xiii.

[2] *The Cloud of Unknowing*, ch. iv.

mystics; in it lay Rolle's salvation, his way of hope. He might be and was irritably sensitive; the faint rumour of his strained relations with not a few of his fellows sounds through the years and will ever murmur about his name, but he could and did love—"who loved well because he hated, Hated wickedness that hinders loving," perhaps.

Sometimes men speak and write as if Purgation were, in some sort, less beautiful and holy than Illumination and Union, whereas the idea of comparison between them is wholly out of place. Without the first, the other two are impossible, and all alike can only exist in an atmosphere of love. "Love is a perfection of learning," Rolle cries, "virtue of prophecy, fruit of truth, help of sacraments, establishing of wit and knowledge; riches of pure men, life of dying men. So, how good love is. . . . If thou wilt ask how good is he or she?—ask how much he or she loves, and that no man can tell. For I hold it folly to judge a man's heart; that none knows save God. Love is a righteous turning from all earthly things, and is joined to God, and kindled with the fire from the Holy Ghost; far from defilement, far from corruption, bound to no vice of this life. High above all fleshly lusts, aye ready and greedy for the contemplation of God. In all things not overcome. The sum of all good affections.

Health of good manners, goal of the commandments of God ; death of sins, life of virtues. Virtue while fighting lasts, crown of overcomers." [1]

To the unknown author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* purgation consists in directing the will and fastening it on to God alone. Only implicitly does he refer, in the subjoined passage, to ascetic cleansing, the purging of the senses and the will : " One thing I tell thee, He is a jealous lover, and suffereth no fellowship, and Him list not work in thy will, but if He be only with thee by Himself. He asketh none help, but only thyself. He wills thou do but look on Him, and let Him alone. And keep thou the windows and the door, for flies and enemies assailing." [2]

He insists on man's total inability to perform this cleansing work alone and unaided : " It is the lightest work of all when a soul is helped with grace in sensible list,[3] and soonest done. But else it is hard and wonderful to thee to do.

" Let not, therefore, but travail therein till thou full list. For at the first time when thou dost it, thou findest but a darkness ; and as it were a cloud of unknowing, thou knowest not what, save that thou feelest in thy will a naked intent unto God. This darkness and this cloud is, howsoever thou dost, betwixt thee and thy

[1] *The Form of Perfect Living*, ch. x.

[2] *The Cloud of Unknowing*, ch. ii. [3] joyous activity.

God, and letteth thee that thou mayest neither see Him clearly by light of understanding in thy reason, nor feel Him in sweetness of love in thine affection. And therefore, shape thee to bide in this darkness as long as thou mayest, evermore crying after Him that thou lovest. For if ever thou shalt feel Him or see Him as it may be here, it behoveth always to be in this cloud of darkness. And if thou wilt busily travail as I bid thee, I trust in His mercy thou shalt come thereto." [1]

Perhaps no other English author has come so near to S. John of the Cross as this unknown writer. The temperamental contrast between him and Rolle seems complete. To the latter never under any circumstances did purgation appear "the lightest work of all."

From time to time, like all the other mystics, he insists on the actual cleansing of the soul by the accustomed means appointed for all alike. In the twenty-eighth chapter of *The Cloud of Unknowing* he urges that no start in the mystical life can be made by any "ere they have cleansed their conscience of all their special deeds of sin done before, after the common ordinance of Holy Church." Again he says "whoso will travail in this work, let him first clean his conscience . . . this is that work in which a soul should travail all his life-time, though

[1] *The Cloud of Unknowing*, ch. iii.

he had never sinned deadly. And the whiles that a soul is dwelling in this deadly flesh it shall evermore see and feel this cumbrous cloud of unknowing betwixt him and God."

In *An Epistle of Discretion*, if it be really his, he refers directly to the senses, and leaving his accustomed manner, reminiscent as it is of S. John of the Cross, who wrote a century and a half later, he approximates more closely to the author of the *Ancren Riwle* : "Beware and prove well thy stirrings, and whence they come ; for how so thou art stirred, whether from within by grace, or from without on ape's manner, God wot and I not.[1] Nevertheless, this may I say thee in eschewing of perils like unto this : look that thou be no ape, that is to say, look that thy stirrings to silence or to speaking, to fasting or to eating, to onliness or to company, whether they be come from within of abundance of love or of devotion in the spirit, and not from without of thy bodily wits, as thine ears and thine eyes. For, as Jeremiah saith plainly, by such windows cometh in death : *Mors intrat per fenestras*." [2]

If we will really grasp the doctrine of the mystics, not in the lump, so to speak, for that cannot be done, but of each one, fully, adequately, in turn, then we must give heed to the

[1] i.e. ne wot = know not.

[2] *An Epistle of Discretion*, p. 103 of *The Cell of Self-Knowledge*.

almost passionate entreaty of the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*: "And over this I charge thee and I beseech thee, by the authority of charity, that if any such shall read it, write it, or speak it, or else hear it to be read or spoken, that thou charge him as I do thee for to take time to read it, speak it, write it, or hear it all over. For peradventure there is some matter therein, in the beginning or in the middle, the which is hanging, and not fully declared where it standeth: and if it be not there, it is soon after, or else in the end. Wherefore, if a man saw one matter and not another, peradventure he might lightly be led into error; and therefore in eschewing of this error, both in thyself and in all other, I pray thee for charity do as I say thee." [1]

If we choose to content ourselves with snippets; if we will not consider it "all over," we are bound to misrepresent the reality of mysticism. For example, where we find such a warning as "All thy life now behoveth altogether to stand in desire," [2] we might hastily say that this goes clean contrary to such a mystic as Jean Rigoleuc, the seventeenth-century Jesuit, when he counsels us to rid ourselves of all effort to find God, since "He finds us." But if we turn the page of *The Cloud*, we find overleaf a qualifying pas-

[1] *The Cloud of Unknowing*, p. 46. [2] ibid., p. 69.

sage, which I have already quoted : "He asketh none help, but only thyself. He wills thou do but look on Him, and let Him alone. And keep thou the windows and the door, for flies and enemies assailing."

It is only by taking mysticism whole that a sane balance can be kept. Our great fourteenth-century woman mystic, Mother Julian, differs in manner and matter from her contemporaries, Rolle, Hilton, and the anonymous writers. Her emphasis is on illumination : "This is a revelation of Love, that Jesu Christ our endless blisse made in xvi shewings," so her unique little book begins.

It is right to note that if the addendum to the British Museum MS. be Mother Julian's, and not merely the copyist's, then she, in closing her book, definitely claims union as the crown of her illumination : "Thus endeth the Revelation of Love of the blissid Trinite shewid by our Savior Christ Jesu, for our endles comfort and solace, and also to enjoyen in him in this passand journey of this life."

A subtle unlikeness to Mother Julian runs through this passage however. Her concentration on illumination leaves very little space for purgation. So far as she does treat of it she handles it with surprising individuality. To begin with, her horror of sin will not only seem extravagant in an age like the present,

which so widely denies the existence of such a thing, but would be impressive in any age. S. Paul did not dwell on it more vividly : "I am sure by my own feeling, the more that each kind soul seeth this in the courteous love of our Lord God, the lother is him to sin, and the more he is ashamed : for if it were laid before us all the pain that is in hell, and in purgatory and in earth, to suffer it rather than sin, we should rather choose all that pain than sin ; for sin is so vile, and so mickle for to hate that it may be likned to no pain ; which pain is not sin. And to me was shewed none harder hell than sin ; for a kind soul hateth no pain but sin, for all is good but sin, and naught is evil but sin." [1]

This attitude to sin has in it nothing conventional, nothing borrowed from a human teacher : it is the instinctive recoil of a soul brought face to face with real, actual sin, in its utmost direness. Later on she says, "Now me behooveth to tell in what manner that I saw sin deadly, in the creatures which should not die for sin, but live in the glory of God without end. I saw that *two* contraries should not be together in one steed.[2] The most contrarious that are is the highest bliss, and the deepest pain. The highest bliss that is is to have God in clerity of endless light, him verily seeing,

[1] *Revelations of Divine Love*, ch. xl. [2] place.

him sweetly feeling, him all peaceable having in fulhead of joy : and this was the blessedful chear [1] of our Lord God showed in party. In which shewing I saw that sin was the most contrary, so far forth that, as long as we be medled with any part of sin, we shall never see clearly the blessed chear of God. And the horriblier and the grievouser that our sins be, the deeper are we for that time fro this blessed sight . . . thus we are dead for the time fro the very sight of our blessedful life." [2]

Then follows a passage singular for its gathering up in one the very core of mysticism—the need for purgation, the light of "showing," and the goal of it all, union : "But in all this I saw faithfully that we be not dead in the sight of God, ne he passeth never from us, but he shall never have his full bliss in us till we have our full bliss in him, verily seeing his fair blessedful chear, for we are ordained thereto in kind, and getten thereto by grace."

As we ponder on Mother Julian's indestructible, abiding horror of sin, that most "contrary thing" to God, we can only parallel it with Job's bitter, broken-hearted cry : "*Auditu auris audivi te ; nunc autem oculus meus videt te. Idcirco ipse me reprehendo, et ago poenitentiam in*

[1] face. [2] *Revelations of Divine Love*, ch. lxxi.

favilla et cinere." [1] Yet that which Job saw lacked an element present to Mother Julian. She perceived that it is not merely by looking at sinfulness, or even at specific sins—repeating, in self-examination, as we are apt to do, the weary familiar questions, have I done this? have I said that? have I thought the other? with the monotonous affirmative refrain which truth compels—that men and women come to loathe sin; nor is it even by meditation on the majestic purity of God, as that was made evident to Job; nor even by that holy fear which she enjoins: "As good as God is, as great he is: and as much as it longeth to his Godhead to be loved, so much it longeth to his great highness to be dread. For this reverent dread is the fairer courtesie that is in heaven before God's face . . . Wherefore it behooveth needs to be, that all heaven, all earth shall tremble and quake, when the pillars shall tremble and quake." [2]

In the following chapter a fuller reference to this holy fear brings us to realize what true conviction of sin means: "I speak but little of this reverent dread. . . . But well I wote that our Lord shewed me no souls but those that dread him; for well I wote the soul that truly

[1] Job xlii. 5, 6 (Vulg.): "I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear, and now mine eye seeth Thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

[2] *Revelations of Divine Love*, ch. lxxiv.

taketh the teaching of the Holy Ghost, it hateth more sin for the vileness and the horribility than it doth all the pain that is in hell. For the soul that beholdeth the kindness of our Lord Jesu, it hateth no hell; but hell is sin as to my sight."[1]

Here we see the true nature of purgation, which, though it may need to be worked out in an atmosphere into which fear enters, is yet for ever differentiated from fear. Here also we learn that though for convenience of explanation purgation is usually regarded as preceding illumination in the development of the mystical life, they are really inextricably interdependent. Only the pure in heart can "see" God, yet until a man has caught some transient gleam of God he will scarcely set out to cleanse himself. As they are interwoven at the outset, so along the Way they act and react. Illumination is the Holy Spirit's gift; and so Père Lallemant writes: "Les deux éléments de la vie intérieure sont la purgation du coeur, et la direction du Saint Esprit. Ce sont là les deux pôles de toute la spiritualité."[2]

The profoundest cause, not, so far as we can judge, perceived by Job, of purgative effort Mother Julian has shown in earlier chapters: "He without voyce and opening of lips formed

[1] ibid., ch. lxxv. [2] *La Doctrine Spirituelle*, p. 181.

in my soul these words: *Herewith is the fiend overcome.* This word said our Lord, meaning His blessed passion, as He shewed before. In this our Lord shewed part of the fiend's malice, and fully his unmight, for He shewed that the passion of Him is the overcoming of the fiend." [1] Then again she writes: "The shewing of Christ's pains filled me full of pains, for I wist well that He suffered but once: but as He would shew it me, and fill me with mind, as I had before desired. And in all this time of Christ's presence, I felt no pain but for Christ's pains.

"Then thought me, I knew full little what pain it was that I asked, and as a wretch I repented me, thinking if I had wist what it had been, loath had me been to have prayed it; for methought my pains passed any bodily death. I thought, 'Is any pain in hell like this?' and I was answered in my reason, *Hell is an other pain, for there is despair; but of all pains that lead to salvation this is the most, to see the Lover to suffer.* How might any pain be more than to see him that is all my life, all my bliss, and all my joy, suffer? Here (felt) I steadfastly, that I loved Christ so much above myself that there was no pain that might be suffered like to that sorrow I had to see him in pain." [2]

[1] *Revelations of Divine Love*, ch. xiii. [2] ibid., ch. xvii.

It is the Passion of Christ, realized, which, as the guilt of having caused it comes home to the awakened illumined soul, adds an intensity which is not found in Job's "wherefore I abhor myself."

The earnest and detailed manner of meditating on the sacred Passion, which was practised in mediaeval times, is clearly shown in these three passages from S. Bonaventura's *Privity of the Passion*. His works were widely read, in the original, and in the English form, as that has come down to us in the Thornton MS. in Lincoln Cathedral Library. If, as is probable, Rolle was not its translator, it is none the less an excellent specimen of England's unadorned, intensely direct devotional method.

The first passage dwells on the need for intellectual effort in meditation on the Passion: "For he that searcheth into it with deep thought, and with all his thought lastingly, he shall find full many things therein stirring him to new compassion, new love, new ghostly comfort, and so shall he be brought into a new ghostly sweetness. To get this state that I speak of, I trow that it behoves a man to raise up all the sharpness of his mind, and open wide the inner eye of his soul."

Though there was no fussy popular talk about psychology in the fourteenth century, it existed as the following passage shows: "Thou

shalt understand that there were many and diverse wills in Him, as Doctors say: there was in Him the will of the flesh, and that one would nowise suffer death: there was also in Him the will of Reason, and that was obedient and consenting to die: there was also in Him the will of the God-head, and that commanded and ordained Him to die."

These extracts are from what I might call the introduction to the *Privity of the Passion*. Then follow meditations for "the Hours." That for None is on the Seven Words. The treatment in this very free English translation of the fifth word is a good example of the wholesome, sober realization of facts, so characteristic of our forefathers: "The fifth word was 'I thirst.' This was a bitter word, full of compassion,[1] both to His Mother and to S. John, and to all His friends that loved Him tenderly: and to the unpitying Jews it was full of comfort and great joy. For though it were so that He thirsted for the health of man's soul, nevertheless, in all soothfastness He thirsted bodily: and that was no wonder, for through shedding of His precious blood so abundantly, and for the great anguish which He suffered without ceasing from the Thursday at even to the Friday at high noon, He was all inwardly dry and thirsty. And when

[1] i.e. provoking compassion.

these unpitying men bethought themselves in what they might most injure Him, they took vinegar and gall and mingled together and gave Him to drink."

Though Mother Julian shows, perhaps more definitely than some other writers, the connection between Purgation and Illumination, she goes on, in a wonderful strain, to show how the former may cease for a time, and then illumination floods into the cleansed soul: "It is God's will as to my understanding that we have three manners of beholding of his blessed passion. The first is the beholding the hard pain that he suffered with a contrition and compassion: and that shewed our Lord at this time, and gave me grace and might to see it. And I looked after the departing with all my mights, and weened to have seen the body all dead, but I saw him not so. And right in the same time that me thought by seeming that the life might no longer last, and the shewing of the end behoved needs to be nigh, suddenly I beholding in the same cross, he changed in blessedful chear: the changing of his blessed chear changed mine, and I was as glad and merry as it was possible. Then brought our Lord merrily to my mind, *Where is now any point of thy pain or of thy anguish?* And I was full merry: I understood that we be now, in our Lord's meaning, in his Cross with him —in our pains and in our passion—dying.

And we wilfully [1] abiding in the same cross, with his help and his grace into the last point, he shall suddenly change his chear to us: and we shall be with him in heaven: between that one and that other shall all be one time, and then shall all be brought into joy. And so meant he in this shewing: *Where is now any point of thy pain or thy grief?* . . . And for this little pain that we suffer here, we shall have an high endless knowing in God, which we might never have here without that; and the harder our pains have been with him in his Cross, the more shall our worship be with him in his kingdom."[2] Only the Psalmist's verse seems the right comment on such illumination as this—"*Tunc locutus es in visione sanctis tuis.*"[3]

As Père Bremond wrote of Père Lallemant, so we may feel as we come away from our own mystics: "Après avoir rencontré un de ces hommes extraordinaires à qui le monde surnaturel paraît plus reel que l'autre, on n'est plus le même."[4] Was it perhaps the mystical fibre in Socrates, the capacity to realize the supernatural, which caused it to be said of him that men went away from hearing him

[1] i.e. with full deliberate will.

[2] *Revelations of Divine Love*, ch. xxi.

[3] Ps. lxxxviii. 20 (Vulg.). "Thou spakest sometimes in visions unto Thy saints" (Coverdale).

[4] *Histoire Littéraire du Sentiment Religieux en France*, p. 67.

talk with the point of what he said sticking in their minds so that they could not get rid of it?

Rolle's account of Illumination is at least as characteristic and individual as Mother Julian's, and far more deliberately thought out and elaborated. He distinguishes three conditions of the soul, which he calls respectively *heat*, *song*, and *sweetness*; though when all the pertinent passages are put side by side, it still remains a little difficult to discover precisely where purgation becomes illumination, and illumination passes into contemplation or union.

His description of his sudden illumination, after a bitter period of purgation lasting for more than two and a half years, is the more impressive because he first writes of it as if it could be discussed from the point of view of one not illumined but merely taught by books, and heightens this probability by descanting on the possibility of being deceived: "As I, forsooth, seeking in Scripture might find and know, the high love of Christ soothly stands in three things: in heat, in song, in sweetness."[1] It will be noticed that he does not say his knowledge is, but that it might be derived from Scripture. Further on he sounds a note of warning: "Some ignorant of con-

[1] *The Fire of Love*, Bk. I, ch. xiv.

templative life are deceived by the fiend of the midday [1] into a false and feigned sweetness, for they trow themselves full high when they are low." [2]

This suggests what experience proves, that mere book-knowledge of mysticism may lead a man far astray. Rolle, however, in between these two passages which I have quoted, confesses that he is not a mere curious student; he describes illumination from the point of view of one illumined: "I have now, Jesu granting, received these three after the littleness of my capacity. . . .

"Soothly, *heat* I call it when the mind is truly kindled in love everlasting; and the heart in the same manner, not hopingly, but verily, is felt to burn. For the heart turned into fire gives the feeling of burning love.

"*Song*, I call it, when in a soul the sweetness of everlasting praise is received with plenteous burning, and thought is turned into song, and the mind is changed into full sweet sound.

"These two are not gotten in idleness, but in high devotion, to which the third is near, that is to say, *sweetness* untrowed. For heat and song truly cause a marvellous sweetness in the soul; and also they may be caused by full great sweetness. Truly there is not any deceit

[1] "Ab incursu, et daemonio meridiano."—*Ps.* xc. 6 (Vulg.).

[2] *The Fire of Love*, Bk. I, ch. xiv.

in this plenteousness, but rather it is the most perfect ending of all deeds." [1]

A beautiful passage in an earlier chapter calls mystics "the receivers of the joy of love," and declares that "they are altogether set on fire with the most high fire of love burning within their souls. So sweetly and devoutly have they loved God that whatsoever they have felt in themselves was ghostly heat, heavenly song, and godly sweetness." [2]

Perhaps Rolle's nearest approach, that is so far as he puts it into words, to the doctrine of "the spark at the apex of the soul" is found in these words: "His love truly is fire, making our souls fiery, which fire burning in them that are chosen ever makes them look up in mind." [3] He returns to this, but more vaguely, in the next chapter: "In this burning of sweetest love they are taken up to the beholding of their Beloved: and by means of this most happy flame they are flourishing in virtue, and freely enjoy their Maker, and their mind changed now passes into the melody that lasts"; and again, with a touch of the intenser emphasis which marks the fourth chapter: "They are altogether set on fire with the most high fire of love, burning within their souls." [4]

Then, after dwelling again on the hard

[1] ibid., ch. xix. [2] ch. v. [3] ch. iv. [4] ch. iv.

Purgative Way, beset as it is with the temptations of "low things" on every hand, he pulls himself up short as he bethinks himself of the one only remedy: "But these outcasting for the sake of one, my soul was taken up to the love of my Maker; and desiring to be endlessly delighted with sweetness, I gave my soul up so that in devotion she should love Christ." [1]

With rapture he tells of the flooding, illumining light: "Forsooth, three years except three or four months were run from the beginning of the change of my life and of my mind, to the opening of the heavenly door; so that the Face being shown, the eyes of the heart might behold and see, by what way they might seek my Love, and unto Him continually desire. The doors forsooth, yet biding open, nearly a year passed until the time in which the heat of everlasting love was verily felt in my heart.

"I was sitting forsooth in a chapel, and whiles I was mickle delighted with sweetness of prayer and meditation, suddenly I felt within me a merry and unknown heat. But first I wavered, for a long time doubting what it could be. I was expert that it was not from a creature, but from my Maker, because I found it grow hotter and more glad.

"Truly in this unhoped for, sensible, and

[1] ibid., ch. xv.

sweet-smelling heat, half a year, three months, and some weeks have outrun, until the unshedding and receiving of this ghostly sound. . . .

"Whiles truly I sat in this same chapel . . . whiles also I took heed praying to heaven with my whole desire, suddenly, I wot not in what manner, I felt in me the noise of song, and received the most liking heavenly melody which dwelt with me in my mind . . . and in my prayers and psalm-singing (saying). I uttered the same sound, and henceforth, for plenteousness of inward sweetness, I burst out singing what before I said, but forsooth privily, because alone before my Maker." [1]

Another passage shows that *heat*, *song*, and *sweetness*, while in one sense degrees of illumination, in another indicate all the three mystical *steps* — cleansing, illumination, and union: "Wherefore, from the beginning of my changed soul into the high degree of Christ's love, the which, God granting, I was able to attain—in which degree I might sing God's praises with joyful song—I was four years and about three months. Here forsooth—with the first disposition of love gathered into this degree, she bides to the very end; and also after death she shall be more perfect; because here the joy of love or burning of charity is begun,

[1] ch. xv.

and in the heavenly kingdom it shall receive its most glorious ending. And forsooth she profits not a little, set in these degrees in life, but she ascends not into another degree, but as it were confirmed in grace, as far as mortal man can, she rests." [1]

Here Rolle writes as if only a very shadowy degree of union were possible to man in this life; but in the beautiful close of the treatise he wrote for Margaret Kirkby—*The Form of Perfect Living*, couched on the whole in a more restrained vein than *The Fire of Love*—he writes with far more confidence, admitting the possibility of partial "sight" here, which shall become full vision hereafter: "A man or woman that is appointed to contemplative life, first God inspires them to forsake this world and all the vanity and covetousness and vile lust thereof. Afterwards, He leads them by their love and speaks to their heart . . . and then He sets them in the will to give themselves wholly to prayers and meditations and tears. Afterwards, when they have suffered many temptations, and when the foul annoyances of thoughts that are idle and of vanities which will encumber those who cannot destroy them are passing away, He makes them gather up their heart to them and fasten it only in Him, and opens to the eye of their souls the

[1] ibid., ch. xv.

gates of heaven; and then the fire of love verily lies in their heart and burns therein, and makes it clean from all earthly filth, and afterwards they are contemplative men, and ravished in love. For contemplation is a sight, and they see into heaven with their ghostly eye. But thou shalt wit that no man has perfect sight of heaven while they live bodily here. But as soon as they die they are brought before God, and see Him face to face and eye to eye, and dwell with Him without end. For Him they sought, and Him they coveted, and Him they loved with all their might. Lo Margaret, I have told thee shortly the Form of Living, and how thou mayest come to perfection, and to love Him whom thou hast taken thee to. If it do thee good, and profit to thee, thank God and pray for me. The grace of Jesus Christ be with thee and keep thee. Amen." [1]

The contrast between this closing passage and the conclusion of *The Fire of Love* is sharp: "In the beginning truly of my conversion and singular purpose, I thought I would be like the little bird that languishes for the love of his beloved, but is gladdened in his longing when he that it loves comes (and sings with joy and in its song) also languishes, but in sweetness and heat. It is said that the nightingale is given to song and melody all night,

[1] *The Form of Perfect Living*, ch. xi.

that she may please him to whom she is joined. How mickle more should I sing with greatest sweetness to Christ my Jesu, that is Spouse of my soul through all this present life that is night in regard to the clearness to come, so that I should languish in longing and die for love. . . . O good Jesu, Thou hast bound my heart in the thought of Thy Name, and now I can not but sing it ; therefore have mercy upon me, making perfect that Thou hast ordained. Thy true and busy lover is ravished into ghostly song of mind, that it is impossible that any such sweetness be of the fiend, or such heat from any creature, nor such song from man's wit : in which if I abide, I shall be safe." [1]

Perhaps in few matters do men differ more than in their appreciation of spiritual writings. Probably, therefore, some will find the climax of Rolle's beauty of soul in this passage, others in the final paragraphs of *The Form of Perfect Living*. It must be admitted that in *The Fire of Love* he is partially attending to himself and to his feelings as he likens himself to a little bird. In the other, as he tells of the Perfect Way, he seems to have forgotten everything but the goal : " Him they sought, Him they coveted, and Him they loved with all their might."

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[1] *The Fire of Love*, Bk. II, ch. xii.

The Fire of Love has come down to us in Latin, the Latin of the Middle Ages. *The Form of Perfect Living* Rolle wrote in that vernacular which he was one of the earliest English writers to use persistently and so effectively. In his beautiful Middle English—cadenced, picturesque, directly to the point—he surely had found a vehicle fit to carry that sober, indestructible devotion which is so sweet and signal a characteristic of fourteenth-century England.

Professor Horstman, in his edition of Rolle's works, describes him as "one of the most prolific and influential authors of the time," and observes that, among others, Walter Hilton "passed through his school." [1]

That may be so, but the process did not cost Hilton his individuality. One vital distinction between the two men lies in Hilton's implicit and explicit disclaimer of being himself a mystic. He describes the mystical state, but, so he will have it, from the outside and not, so far as he will admit, from experience. First, he does this implicitly: "To the perfection of this high Contemplation may no man come till he be first reformed in soul to the likeness of Jesus, in the perfection of virtues; nor can any man living in mortal body have it continually and habitually in the height of it, but by

[1] Library of Early English Writers, *Richard Rolle of Hampole*, vol. i, p. xiv.

times when he is visited. And, as I conceive by the writings of holy men, it is a full short time, for some time after he returneth to a sobriety of bodily feeling." [1]

Then, this time explicitly, he writes: "So then, I have told thee a little, as methinketh, first of Contemplative Life, what it is; and then of the ways which, by the grace of God, lead thereunto. Not as if I had it myself in feeling and working, as I have it in talking. Nevertheless I would by this writing of mine (such as it is) first stir up my own negligence to do better than I have done." [2]

Yet, though he makes no claim to such a place, he is rightly ranked with the mystics, for had he really had no mystical experience, how could he have written as he does at the end of his book: "These are the spiritual things that I spake of before . . . and I do but touch them a little for direction of a soul; for a soul that is pure, stirred up by grace to use this working, may see more of such spiritual working in an hour than can be writ in a great book"? [3]

That is the kind of touch which differentiates knowledge from mere curious or studious interest.

Then, as a smaller but still significant

[1] *The Scale of Perfection*, Bk. I, pt. i, ch. ix. [2] ibid.
[3] ibid., Bk. II, pt. iii, ch. xv.

unlikeness to Rolle, there is his use of quite different terms. He speaks of "contemplation" not, as Rolle does, as if it were practically synonymous with union, but as being of three kinds, of which, properly, only the last can be described as mystical. Thus he writes: "Contemplative life hath three parts. The first consisteth in knowing God, and of spiritual things gotten by reason and discourse, by teaching of men, and by study in Holy Scripture. . . . This part have specially in them learned men and great scholars, who through long study and travail in Holy Writ, attain to this knowledge more or less by the abilities of their natural wit, which God giveth to every one, more or less, that hath use of reason. This knowledge is good, and may be called a kind or part of Contemplation, inasmuch as it is a sight of verity and a knowledge of spiritual things. Nevertheless it is but a figure and shadow of true *Contemplation*, since it hath no spiritual gust or taste in God, nor inward sweetness, which none feels but he that is in great love of charity; for it is the proper Well or Spring of our Lord, to which no alien is admitted. But this aforesaid manner of knowing is common both to good and bad without charity, and therefore it is not very contemplation." [1]

[1] Bk. I, pt. i, ch. iv.

There seems no difference oetween this condition and ordinary theological learning.

Then Hilton describes the "second sort of contemplation," saying that it "lieth principally in affection, without spiritual light in the understanding or sight of spiritual things, and this is commonly of simple and unlearned men who give themselves wholly to devotion." [1] He goes on to describe this condition as occurring when a person is meditating or praying : "He findeth all the powers of his soul to be gathered together, and the thought and love of his heart to be drawn up from all transitory things, aspiring and tending upwards towards God by a fervent desire and spiritual delight, yet nevertheless, during that time, he hath no plain sight in his understanding of spiritual things, nor in particular of any of the mysteries or senses of the Holy Scriptures : but only for that time nothing seemeth so plain and delightful as to pray or think as he then doth for the savoury delight and comfort that he findeth therein, and yet cannot he tell what it is, but he feeleth it well." [2] Hilton goes on to say : "Such feelings as these cannot be had without great grace, and whoso hath any of them or other such like, he is at that time in charity and the grace of God." [3]

It is evident that here Hilton is not speaking

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[1] ibid., ch. v. [2] ibid. [3] ibid.

either of illumination proper or of union, but rather of the gaining of that atmosphere of love which all mystics regard as a pre-essential to every genuine mystical state. Hilton insists on nothing being *seen*, or *known*, or *understood* in this condition; he "cannot tell what it is, but he feeleth it well." He is describing a state of the feelings, rather than a phase of mystical awareness.

Then he comes to the "third sort of contemplation." In this condition illumination and union seem, according to Hilton, to be gathered up into one single happening: "The third sort, which is as perfect Contemplation as can be had in this life, consisteth both in knowing and affecting; that is, in knowing and perfect loving of God, which is when a man's soul is first reformed by perfection of virtues to the image of Jesus, and afterwards when it pleaseth God to visit him, he is taken in from all earthly and fleshly affections, from vain thoughts and imaginings of all bodily creatures, and, as it were, much ravished and taken up from his bodily senses, and then by the grace of the Holy Ghost is enlightened to see by his understanding Truth itself (which is God) and spiritual things with a soft, sweet, burning love in God, so perfectly that he becometh ravished with His love, and so the soul for the time is become one with God. . . . The beginning of this *Contemplation* may be felt in this life, but

the full perfection of it is reserved unto the bliss of heaven. Of this union and conforming to our Lord speaks S. Paul thus: *Qui adhaeret Deo unus spiritus est cum eo. . . .* And surely in this *oneing* consisteth the marriage which passeth betwixt God and the soul, that shall never be dissolved or broken." [1]

That mystical experience is not an individual idiosyncrasy, nor, as some seem to think, even worse, a species of mental failure, is shown by the parallelism of exposition and description exhibited by different mystical writers. The more the great Catholic mystics are studied the more evident becomes the fundamental similarity of their experience. A salient instance of a resemblance, not only material but to a great extent verbal, to these passages from Hilton may be found in *The Epistle of Prayer*: "I would that thou knew what manner of working it is that knitteth man's soul to God, and that maketh it one with Him in love and accordance of will, after the word of S. Paul, saying thus: *Qui adhaeret Deo, unus spiritus est cum illo*; . . . that is though all that God and he be two and sere" (sundry?) "in kind, nevertheless yet in grace they are so knit together that they are but one in spirit: and all this is for onehead of love and accordance of will; and in this onehead is the marriage

[1] ibid., Bk. I, pt. i, ch. viii.

made between God and the soul, the which shall never be broken . . . but by a deadly sin." [1]

Hilton's doctrine of purgation, its necessity and manner, is to be found in the opening chapter of his *Treatise written to a Devout Man*, wherein he warns his "dear Brother in Christ" that "a spiritual man must first use much Bodily exercise in Penance and in Destroying of Sin."

Hilton enumerates the usual methods of mortifying the body—fasting, watching, self-restraint, performance of penance. But his emphasis is on the necessity of eradicating spiritual sins: "Break down first pride within thee . . . mortifying within thee all vainglory and complacence in thyself for any talent, gift, or thing corporal or spiritual that God hath bestowed on thee." [2] Next comes the command: "Mortify and destroy within thee, as soon as thou art able, all envy and anger toward thy Christian brethren"; and next, "all coveting of worldly goods." Lastly, "Mortify also, and destroy as much as thou canst, all yielding to bodily sloth, and unnecessary bodily ease, and the sensual vices of gluttony and luxury."

Though, so far as actual phrases go, Hilton

[1] *The Epistle of Prayer*, published in *The Cell of Self-Knowledge*, p. 88.

[2] *Treatise to a Devout Man*, ch. i.

does not, in *The Scale of Perfection*, dwell on the work of purgation, yet he says much about the necessity for and the method of disciplining the senses.

He writes, in the true vein of sound Catholic mysticism, that "visions, revelations, or any manner of spirit in bodily appearing . . . or any other things that may be felt by bodily sense, though it be never so comfortable and liking, yet be they not very *Contemplation*, but simple and secondary . . . all such manner of feeling may be good, wrought by a good angel, and they may be deceivable, wrought by a wicked angel." [1]

He then provides a test whereby the devout person may decide whether "such manner of feeling" be good or bad. If it prove so pleasant, so he warns us, that "thou feelest thy heart drawn from the minding and beholding of Jesus Christ and from spiritual exercises . . . and therefore comest to think that thou shouldest neither pray nor think of anything else, but wholly attend thereto for to keep it and delight thyself therein; then is this feeling very suspicious to come from the enemy, and therefore though it were never so liking and wonderful, refuse it and assent not thereto, for this is a sleight of the enemy. When he seeth a soul that would entirely give itself to

[1] *The Scale of Perfection*, Bk. I, pt. i, ch. xi.

spiritual exercises, he is wonderfully wroth . . . and therefore if he cannot hinder him by open sinning he will let and beguile him by such variety of bodily savours or sweetness in the senses, to bring a soul into spiritual pride and into a false security of himself." [1] On the other hand, he says if such feeling as this, "let not thy heart from spiritual exercises, but maketh thee more devout, and more fervent to pray, more wise to think ghostly thoughts . . . by these tokens mayest thou know it is of God." [2]

Of the five senses, as five windows, Hilton writes, and with the same reference to Jeremiah as do Rolle and the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* ; [3] but he adds a further warning, viz. the necessity of stopping "up the privy holes of the imaginations of thy heart."[4] This is a reference to imagination in the word's primary sense—the power of picturing objects no longer present to sense—and a warning against dwelling on such pictures until desire for them rules the whole man and his thoughts.

The author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, who so frequently adds little individual touches to the main theory common to all mystics, though he admits the possibility of sense deception, insists rather more explicitly on the duty which even "Brother Ass" owes to God: "God forbid

[1] ibid. [2] ibid. [3] ibid., Bk. I, pt. iii, ch. ix.
[4] ibid., ch. x.

that I should depart[1] that which God hath coupled, the body and the spirit."[2] There is an apt, sly humour about this unknown writer which, coupled with his very English distaste for an unnecessary fuss, makes him specially wholesome and refreshing: "And of the tother comforts and sounds and sweetness, how thou shouldest wit whether they be good or evil, I think not to tell thee at this time: and that is because me think that it needeth not. For why, thou mayst find it writ in another place of another man's work a thousandfold better than I can say or write; and so mayst thou this that I set here, far better than it is here."[3]

Whoever or whatever this author was, he had no intention of helping or encouraging his "ghostly friend in God" to be "scrupulous."

Miss Evelyn Underhill, in her introduction to *The Cloud of Unknowing*, has pointed out that if it be true that its author introduced into England "the mystical tradition of the Christian Neoplatonists," he brought at the same time to this work of interpretation "deep personal experience and extraordinary psychological gifts."

Certainly *The Cloud of Unknowing*, with its quaintness and minute ironic touches, is one of the most individual and singular of the mystical

[1] separate. [2] *The Cloud of Unknowing*, ch. xlviii.
[3] ibid.

writings of the English fourteenth century. Perhaps its baffling love of humorous paradox culminates in the sixty-eighth chapter.

As we pass down the subsequent centuries, we shall find controversy and polemics too often wasting spiritual energy, and occupying space which could more profitably have been given to devotion. These unhappy tendencies fill the atmosphere, and cannot fail to dull it even for the mystics. After the Reformation, though in one form or another there is frequent reference to purgation and illumination, the achievement of union, and rapturous descriptions of it, grow rarer and more rare.

The utmost, then, must be made of the fourteenth-century's view of it, of "very Contemplation," as Hilton calls it. It is just here, at the very heart of mysticism, that the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* shows his quaint singularity. Presently it will be seen from quotations from other writers to what ecstasy Englishmen could rise.

But rapture is not the mode of this unknown scribe: "And on the same manner, where another man would bid thee gather thy powers and thy wits wholly within thyself and worship God there, although he say full well and full truly, yea! and no man trulier an he be well conceived—yet for fear of deceit and bodily conceiving of his words we list not bid thee do so. But this will I bid thee. Look

on nowise that thou be within thyself. And shortly, without thyself I will not that thou be, nor yet above, nor yet behind, nor on one side, nor on other.

"'Where then?' sayest thou, 'shall I be? Nowhere, by thy tale.' Now truly, thou sayest well, for there would I have thee. For why, nowhere bodily is everywhere ghostly. Look then busily that thy ghostly work be nowhere bodily; and then, wheresoever that thing is on the which thou wilfully workest in thy mind in substance, surely there art thou in spirit, as verily as thy body is in that place that thou art bodily. And although thy bodily wits can find thee nothing to feed them on, for them think it nought that thou dost, yea! do on then this nought, and do it for God's love. . . . Reck then never if thy wits can not reason of this nought. . . . It is so worthy a thing in itself, that they cannot reason thereupon. This nought may better be felt than seen. . . . What is he that calleth it nought? Surely, it is our outer man and not our inner. Our inner man calleth it All, for of it he is well learned to know the reason of all things bodily or ghostly, without any special beholding to any one thing by itself." [1]

Out of this paradoxical medley emerge two key propositions: "nowhere bodily is

[1] ibid., ch. lxviii.

everywhere ghostly," and "do on then this nought."

It is idle to attempt to grade the saints and mystics. While we may be thankful for the plainer counsel of one man, and the rapturous ecstasy of another, this anonymous writer brings his special gift, none the less costly because, like a diamond, it must be cut from a rough wrapping. In his enigmatical way, he has reconciled material and immaterial, he has transcended space, and resolved duration into now : and, with a touch of Plato's Synoptikos, he has caught a transitory flash of "all things together"—"the only kind of knowledge which is everlasting." [1]

Richard Rolle, in far clearer, more ordinary language, approaches this core of the mystery : "He truly knows God perfectly that feels Him incomprehensible and unable to be known." [2]

In the eighty-first chapter of her *Revelations* Mother Julian writes of the "higher beholding" of God, "which keepeth us in ghostly joy and true enjoying of God," and of "the lower beholding which keepeth us in dread and maketh us ashamed of ourself," the first of these being what Hilton calls "very Contemplation."

Her *Revelations* stand alone in English

[1] *The Republic*, Bk. vii, § 537.
[2] *The Fire of Love*, Bk. I, ch. vi.

Mystical Literature. As intensely individual as *The Cloud of Unknowing*, even more amazingly simple and direct, they are also truly apocalyptic. They produce the impression of a soul living so close to God that, like S. Paul once, she ever must have found it hard to know whether she were "in the body or out of the body." In one passage she hints at a state which, possibly, was constant in her life, viz. a sense of this absolute closeness combined with consciousness of something withheld: "Our Lord God dwelleth now in us, and is here with us, and colleth [1] us and becloseth us for tender love that He may never leave us, and is more near to us than tongue may tell or heart may think; yet may we never stint of mourning, nor of weeping, nor of seeking, nor of longing till when we see Him clear in His blessedful chear, for in that precious sight may no woe abide nor weal fail." [2]

Perhaps enough has now been said to make the English fourteenth-century mystics' view of Purgation, Illumination, and Union clear.

There remains one treatise of such delicate beauty and joyousness that it cannot be passed over. It is the *Song of Angels*, which Mr. Edmund Gardner, who reprinted Pepwell's sixteenth-century translation of it in his

[1] embraceth. [2] *Revelations*, ch. lxxi.

edition of *The Cell of Self-Knowledge*, declares "can be assigned with certainty to Walter Hilton."

Professor Horstman, in his edition of Rolle's works, prints two texts of this *Song*, one from a Cambridge MS., the other from the Thornton MS. at Lincoln; they both bear the title of *Angels' Song*. The Rev. G. C. Perry published the latter among the *Prose Treatises of Richard Rolle of Hampole* [1] under the title of *The Anehedd of Godd with mannis saule*. A few passages translated from Horstman will show the beauty and the careful precision too of this brief outpouring of joy: "Our Lord comforts a soul by angels' songs. But what that song is, it may not be described by any bodily likeness, for it is ghostly and above all manner of imagination and man's reason. It may be perceived and felt in a soul, but it may not be told. Never-the-latter, I speak thereof to thee as I think. When a soul is purified by the love of God, illumined by wisdom, stabled by the might of God, then is the eye of the soul opened to behold ghostly things, as virtues, angels, and holy souls, and heavenly things. Then is the soul able by cause of cleanness to feel the touching, the speaking of good angels. This touching and speaking is ghostly, not bodily." [2]

[1] Early English Text Society, No. 20.

[2] Rendered in *The Cell of Self-Knowledge*, pp. 66–7.

Then Hilton, if indeed it be his, proceeds to make his account more definite and precise; and to warn his hearers not to convert a proposition simply, and to realize that conditions may seem to be present, and yet that the expected consequences do not follow: "A soul may not hear except by ravishing of love, and needs to be purified full clean, and full-filled of much charity ere it were able for to hear heavenly sounds. For the sovereign and the essential joy is in the love of God by Himself and for Himself; and the second is in community with and beholding of angels and ghostly creatures. . . . Now then methinks that no soul can feel truly angels' songs nor heavenly sounds unless it be in perfect charity. But not therefore have all who are in perfect charity felt it, but only that soul that is purified in the fire of the love of God, so that all earthly savour is burnt out of it, and all means hindering betwixt the soul and the angels' cleanness are broken and put away from it."[1]

Then returns the fear of mistake, self-deception, the snare dreaded by all true mystics,[2] although disbelievers in mysticism appear sometimes to imagine that no mystic has ever dreamed of such a possibility: "Some man

[1] cf. *The Cell of Self-Knowledge*, pp. 67–8.

[2] cf. *Des Grâces d'Oraison* par le Rev. Père Aug. Poulain, pt. iv, ch. xxi.

when he has long travailed bodily and ghostly in destroying sins and getting virtues, and peradventure has gotten by grace some bit of rest and clarity in conscience, at once he leaves prayers, readings of Holy Writ, and meditations on the Passion of Christ, and the remembrance of his own wretchedness, and ere he be called of God he gathers his wits by violence to seek and behold heavenly things ere his eye be made ghostly by grace, and over travails his wits by imaginations, and by indiscreet travailing turns the brains in his head and breaks to pieces the powers and the wits of the soul and of the body ; and then for feebleness of the brain he thinks to hear wonderful sounds and songs, and that is nothing else but phantasy caused by trouble of the brain, as a man who is in a frenzy thinks to himself that he hears and sees what no other man does ; all is but vanity and phantasy of the head ; or else by working of the enemy who feigns such sounds." [1]

With all its apparatus of terminology and nomenclature, modern psychology has not, in this matter, penetrated much further than the fourteenth century. Nor is the above a solitary example. The author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* is hardly less insistent : "Here may men shortly conceive the manner of this

[1] cf. *The Cell of Self-Knowledge*, pp. 68–9.

working and clearly know that it is far from any fantasy or any false imagination or any quaint deceit. . . . Whoso heareth this work either be read or spoken of and weeneth that it may, or should, be come to by travail in their wits, and therefore they sit and seek in their wits how that it may be, and in this curiosity they travail their imagination peradventure against the course of nature, and they feign a manner of working the which is neither bodily nor ghostly—truly this man, whatsoever he be, is perilously deceived. Insomuch that unless God of His great goodness show His merciful miracle and make him soon to leave work, and meek him to counsel of proved workers, he shall fall either into frenzies, or else into other great mischiefs of ghostly sins and devil's deceits; through the which he may lightly be lost, both life and soul, without any end. And therefore, for God's love be wary in this work, and travail not in thy wits, nor in thy imagination on nowise; for I tell thee truly that it may not be come to by travail in them, and therefore leave them and work not with them." [1]

Those familiar with S. Teresa's *Autobiography* will remember the emphasis with which she declares that the soul is and can be illumined only when and for as long as God wills,

[1] *The Cloud of Unknowing*, ch. iv.

and that *no* human effort can prolong such visitations nor summon them at will.[1] It is strange that, in face of such and so often reiterated statements, charges of self-deception, of undisciplined imagination, of the dangers of empty drifting, of sickly emotion should have been launched constantly against mystics, yet so it is: "For many, mysticism means simply an abandonment of all attempt to reconcile 'the religious sentiment' with intelligent thought, a deliberate yielding one's self a prey to any unchecked and unverifiable fancy or speculation which seems to interpret the vague yearnings of the soul after God."[2] Father Tyrrell, when he wrote that, was not exaggerating. Yet, how could any mystic utter more explicit warnings than those I have just quoted, or than this which closely follows the first of them?—"And therefore, if thou see any man ghostly occupied fall into any of these sins and these deceits, or in frenzies, wit thou well that he never heard nor felt angels' songs, nor heavenly sounds. For soothly, he that truly hears angels' songs, he is made so wise that he shall never err by phantasy, nor by indiscretion, nor by any sleight of the devil."[3]

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[1] *Autobiography of S. Teresa*, ch. xxxix.

[2] George Tyrrell, S.J., *Faith of the Millions*, vol. i, p. 279.

[3] cf. *The Cell of Self-Knowledge*, p. 70.

Then Hilton utters one last warning, provides one final test : "For wit thou well that a naked remembrance or a naked imagination of Jesus, or of any ghostly thing, without sweetness of love in the affection, or without light of knowing in the reason, is but a blindness and a way to deceit, if a man hold it in his own sight more than it is. Therefore, I hold it surer that he be meek in his own feeling, and hold not this remembrance in regard till by custom and using of his mind he may feel the fire of love in his affection, and the light of knowing in his reason." [1]

Perhaps the sensitiveness, the painful quickness of feeling which brought to Rolle so many a sad and even agonizing hour, made him, at the other end of the scale, the most rapturous of our mystics. He may never attain the confident serenity of Mother Julian, who seemed able to rise above emotional fear and intellectual perplexity to some unstirred region of perpetual peace ; but in his hours of attainment he touches a bliss of that intensity which is only possible, perhaps, to one as capable as he of the liveliest suffering : "The singer is led into all mirth, and, the well of endless heat breaking forth in mirth, he is received into halsing [2] and singular solace, and the lover

[1] cf. ibid., p. 72. [2] embrace, or kiss.

is arrayed with the might of the most lovely passage [1] and refreshed in sweet heat.

"He joys, truly glistening whiter than snow and redder than a rose; for he is kindled by God's fire, and going with clearness of conscience he is clad in white. Therefore he is taken up thereto above all others: for in his mind melody abides, and sweet plenty of heat tarries." [2]

Again he writes: "Worldly lovers may soothly know the words or ditties of our song (but not the music of our songs); for they read the words, but they cannot learn the notes and tone and sweetness of the song." [3]

This may not have the ineffable quintessential rapture say of Rolle's Flemish contemporary, Ruysbroeck l'Admirable: "En jouissant, nous sommes oisifs; car Dieu opère seul lorsqu'il ravit hors d'eux-mêmes tous les esprits aimants, les transforme et les consomme dans l'unité de son Esprit. Là, nous sommes tous un seul feu d'amour, ce qui est plus grand que tout ce que Dieu a jamais fait. Chaque esprit est un charbon ardent, que Dieu a allumé dans le feu de son amour infini. Et tous ensemble nous sommes un brasier enflammé, qui ne peut plus jamais être éteint, avec le Père et le Fils, dans l'union du Saint-Esprit, là où les divines personnes

[1] perhaps passage of contemplation.

[2] *Fire of Love*, Bk. II, ch. iv. [3] ibid., ch. xii.

sont ravies elles-mêmes dans l'unité de leur essence, au sein de cet abîme sans fond de la béatitude la plus simple." [1]

Possibly human language cannot reach higher or refine itself further than in this passage ; possibly the Flemish temperament is unique ; but I think it would be hard to find in English a finer fervour than Rolle's, or a more child-like trusting sense of indescribable joy than his in his rare moments of attainment.

I said on a former page that perhaps no other English writer comes so near to S. John of the Cross as the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, the distinctive mark of the great Spaniard being, as every student of mysticism knows, his insistence on that mysterious condition which he calls the Dark Night of the Soul, distinguishing as he did the Night of Sense from the Night of Spirit. The salient marks of the first are aridity of thought and feeling, a total inability to concentrate upon anything, to meditate or reflect, combined with a remembrance of God, a longing desire for restoration to communion with Him ; the whole mingled state being beyond the control —to initiate, to continue, or to conclude—of the human will.

" There is therefore," he writes, " a great

[1] *Les Sept Degrés d'Amour Spirituel*, Traduction du Flamand par les Bénédictins de Saint-Paul de Wisques. Œuvres de Ruysbroeck l'Admirable, 1912, vol. i, p. 289.

difference between dryness and lukewarmness, for the latter consists in great remissness and weakness of will and spirit, in the want of all solicitude about serving God. The true purgative aridity is accompanied in general by a painful anxiety, because the soul thinks it is not serving God." [1] He explains the purpose of the Night of Sense thus : "God leads these persons into the night only to try to humble them, and to correct their desires, that they may not grow up spiritual gluttons, and not for the purpose of leading them into the way of the Spirit, which is Contemplation." [2]

Two more quotations may perhaps throw light on this difficult and mysterious subject : "The first night, or sensual purgation, wherein the soul is purified or detached, will be of the senses, subjecting them to the Spirit. . . . The Night of Sense is common, and the lot of many : these are the beginners." [3]

"The other is that night, or spiritual purgation, wherein the soul is purified and detached in the Spirit, and which subdues and disposes it for union with God in love. . . . The spiritual night is the portion of very few, and they are those who have made some progress." [4]

The whole of the first and fifth chapters of the second book are devoted to explaining the

[1] *The Dark Night of the Soul,* Bk. I, ch. ix, § 4 ; cf. also §§ 2, 3, 6, 8, and 11.

[2] ibid., § 13. [3] ch. viii, § 1. [4] ibid.

nature of the Night of the Spirit. S. John of the Cross, in this fifth chapter, writes: "The dark night is a certain inflowing of God into the Soul, which cleanses it of its ignorances and imperfections, habitual, natural, and spiritual."

He goes on to expound that this Night of Spirit brings not obscurity but pain and torment; and then, in a beautiful passage, he sets forth this night's two-sided nature, which is at once, no matter how great the contradiction may seem, light and darkness, or rather darkness as the effect of transcendent light: "The more clear the light, the more does it blind the eyes of the owl, and the stronger the sun's rays the more it blinds the visual organs. . . . So the divine light of contemplation when it beats on the soul, not yet perfectly enlightened, causes spiritual darkness. . . .

"It is for this reason that S. Dionysius and other mystic theologians call infused contemplation a ray of darkness, that is for the unenlightened and unpurified soul, because this great supernatural light masters the natural power of the reason, and takes away its natural way of understanding." [1]

The logical mind of the Latin races, and the capacity for abstraction and detachment which we find in such typical Flemish thinkers as

[1] Bk. II, ch. x, §§ 3, 4.

Ruysbroeck and certain Brothers of the Common Life, cannot but pursue mysticism into its philosophical fastnesses. For the most part, practical Englishmen leave the mysteries of origins on one side. As a rule, they will accept facts, experience ; indeed, if acceptance do not involve an admission of final defeat, since passing blunders and wasteful experiments by the way disconcert them strangely little, their predilection is almost always, not for giving or taking reasons, not for laying down principles, not for drawing irrefragable conclusions. Though it was a Frenchman who suggested it,[1] they really believe that the heart has a just claim to the first place, and that conduct cannot be subordinated entirely to reason or logic. It is not a necessary but it is a common English conclusion that if this be so, the need for searching into the reason of everything and of explicating all manner of possibilities is not supremely pressing nor vital.

The author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* does not, however, fall into the general English category. While his identity is unknown, it can hardly be doubted that he was a student of S. Dionysius ; probably that study was at once the outcome of an unusual philosophical ten-

[1] "La raison ne connaît par les intérêts du cœur."
"Les grandes pensées viennent du cœur."
Vauvenargues' *Maximes.*

dency, and the cause of its further development. However that may be, it seems sometimes to remove him somewhat from the direct line of English mystical thought; and very possibly S. Dionysius' teaching, that infused contemplation is a ray of darkness, may partly account for his title, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, and for some part of the matter which it covers. Yet, it is only a small part, for the most casual reader will easily detect the difference between his standpoint and that of S. John of the Cross, who agreed constantly with S. Dionysius. The pain which is so habitually present to S. John of the Cross in all which he writes about the Dark Night is absent from *The Cloud of Unknowing*, which is a cloud affecting the intellect, the understanding, not the senses and the soul. In two passages this writer makes as clear as words can the nature of the cloud: "Lift up thine heart to God. . . . And do that in thee is to forget all the creatures that ever God made and the works of them. . . . This is the work of the soul that most pleaseth God. . . . At the first time when thou dost it, thou findest but a darkness; and as it were a cloud of unknowing, thou knowest not what, saving that thou feelest in thy will a naked intent unto God. This darkness and this cloud is, howsoever thou dost, betwixt thee and thy God, and telleth thee that thou mayest neither see Him clearly by light of understanding in

thy reason, nor feel Him in sweetness of love in thine affection. And therefore shape thee to bide in this darkness as long as thou mayest, evermore crying after Him that thou lovest. . . . And if thou wilt busily travail as I bid thee, I trust in His mercy thou shalt come thereto." [1]

The second passage elaborates the idea of this cloud: "Ween not, for I call it a darkness or a cloud, that it be any cloud congealed of the humours that flee in the air, nor yet any darkness such as is in thine house on nights when the candle is out. . . . For when I say darkness, I mean a lacking of knowing: as all that thing that thou knowest not, or else that thou hast forgotten, it is dark to thee; for thou seest it not with thy ghostly eye. And for this reason it is not called a cloud of the air, but a cloud of unknowing, that is betwixt thee and thy God." [2]

These two passages show that the cloud is one which obstructs understanding. But the first of them suggests two further important points: one, that the soul must "busily travail"; and secondly it indicates that this "travail" is not what is generally meant by activity, that undisciplined energy which Rolle calls, and condemns as, "raking about," but is "a naked intent" in the will.

[1] *The Cloud of Unknowing*, ch. iii. [2] ibid., ch. iv.

This matter is cleared up almost directly when the writer speaks of the two "powers" possessed by all "reasonable creatures, angel and man," and differentiates their quality and scope: "To the first, which is a knowledgeable power, God that is the Maker of them is evermore incomprehensible; and to the second, which is the loving power, in each one diversely, He is all comprehensible to the full." [1]

Herein is the "travail to love," or at least here is part, that before "love can have its perfect work," there is the long, searching toil of "meeking us": "Therefore swink and sweat in all that thou canst or mayst, for to get thee a true knowing and a feeling of thyself as thou art; and then I trow that soon after that thou shalt have a true knowing and a feeling of God as He is." [2]

Probably S. John of the Cross would here have interpolated some warning on the Dark Night, but the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* leaves to our various powers of imagination the pain of seeing ourselves "as we are," and presses on hot-foot to the goal of knowing God as He is.

What, then, can pierce this cloud? Not intelligence, for he has said explicitly, "Be thou sure that clear sight shall never man have in

[1] ibid. [2] ch. xiv.

this life." [1] If not intelligence, what? *Love.* "Love may reach to God in this life, but not knowing." [2] Therefore rings out this short, sharp order: "Beat evermore on this cloud of unknowing that is betwixt thee and thy God, with a sharp dart of longing love." [3]

An Epistle of Discretion contains some similar passages: "He may not be known by reason, He may not be gotten by thought, nor concluded by understanding, but He may be loved and chosen with the true lovely will of thine heart." [4]

And again: "Such a blind shot with the sharp dart of longing love may never fail of the prick, the which is God, as Himself saith in the Book of Love when He speaketh to a languishing soul and a loving, saying thus: [5] '*Vulnerasti cor meum soror mea, amica mea, et sponsa mea, vulnerasti cor meum, in uno oculorum tuorum.*'" [6]

In the different treatises usually assigned to him by scholars this unknown author goes over and over the ground, viewing the matter from this angle and from that; but the core of his teaching is contained in the passages already quoted here. It is quite impossible to gain thorough knowledge of the mystical writings of the fourteenth century from

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[1] ch. ix. [2] ch. viii. [3] ch. xii.

[4] *The Cell of Self-Knowledge*, p. 107.

[5] Canticles iv. 9. [6] *The Cell of Self-Knowledge*, p. 108.

extracts. To remove, in some slight measure, the inadequacy of this attempted account, I will add just two more. The first is a really typical example of the droll humour which Englishmen did not find incongruous even in the very sacredest places of devotion, a characteristic less common in mystics of other races—S. Teresa's wit and sense of fun, utterly irrepressible as they were, excepting her from this generalization—one which too many English people seem to have mislaid to-day. Yet even S. Teresa would have expressed this differently : "Some men are so cumbered in nice curious customs in bodily bearing, that when they shall ought hear, they writhe their heads on one side quaintly, and up with the chin : they gape with their mouths as they should hear with their mouth and not with their ears." [1]

Lastly, as an example of highly-developed literary skill and poetic imagination in striking contrast to the grotesque picturesqueness of the above picture, drawn as that so evidently is from some familiar individual, I would direct attention to a passage in *An Epistle of Discretion*, one of singular beauty and faultless suggestion : "For I knew never yet no sinner that might come to the perfect knowing of himself and of his inward disposition, but if he

[1] *The Cloud of Unknowing*, p. 241.

were learned of it before in the school of God, by experience of many temptations, and by many fallings and risings ; for right as among the waves and the floods and the storms of the sea on the one party, and the peaceable wind and the calm and the soft weather of the air on the other party, the sely[1] ship at the last attains to the land and the haven, right so among the diversity of temptations and tribulations that falleth to a soul in this ebbing and flowing life (the which are ensampled by the storm and the floods of the sea) on the one party, and among the grace and the goodness of the Holy Ghost, the manifold visitation, sweetness, and comfort of spirit (the which are ensampled by the peaceable wind and the soft weather of the air) on the other party, the sely soul, at the likeness of a ship, attaineth at the last to the land of stableness, and to the haven of health, the which is the clear and soothfast knowing of himself and of all his inward dispositions, through the which knowing he sitteth quietly in himself, as a king crowned in his royalme mightily, wisely, and goodly governing himself and all his thoughts and stirrings, both in body and soul."[2]

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[1] happy, good, innocent.

[2] *An Epistle of Discretion*, p. 97 of *The Cell of Self-Knowledge*.

CHAPTER IV

English Mystics of the Seventeenth Century

IF any one desire to realize the peculiar savour of the English Mystics of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, he may do so by way of contrast (and that is not altogether a bad method), if he will read Rolle's writings or *The Cloud of Unknowing* alongside of such a contemporary work as *The Divine Soliloquies* of Gerlac Petersen. In this latter he will find a similar profound reality and simple directness, but he will not find that delightfully quaint humour which seems to be embedded in the English nature, and which, even now, after generations of empire-building, money-making, industrial strife, and general sophistication, still lingers in all classes, and not least in those whose occupation brings them nearest to "natural" things; those, for instance, who are sailors, agriculturists of all sorts, as well as those artisans who "get out" or work up raw materials, for—

> the old enchantment lingers in the honey heart of earth.

As I have tried to show, right away back

in the beginnings of our national life the love of outdoor things, of all primitive natural forces, of animals and of the rest of the creatures, of sea and forest and mountain was indigenous in this mixed, strange race of the English. Often that love flowered in a homely, whimsical fun which irradiated every-day life, and was not afraid to touch holy things and even to invade the sanctuary.

When we come to the seventeenth century, an age not less remarkable—one whose peculiar fragrance, whose gentle, urbane serenity, surviving all controversies, all insubordinate questionings, all brutal force, all unkindly tyranny, can never lose its charm nor its appeal—we, none the less, are conscious that an unbridged abyss lies between it and the earlier "centuries of faith." Intellectual scepticism, at first half shy and later even flaunting itself, has arrived: *le moyen âge, énorme et délicat*, has so entirely vanished that no magic skill can restore it. The claim of the Western Church, which, though from time to time challenged for this failure or that, still contrived, while she cared more for men's souls than for temporalities, to hold firm and retain the final supremacy in faith and morals, had, by the seventeenth century, lost through unhappy divisions that super-natural, wholly authoritative appeal which had made her the ark of civilization, and the

protector and counsellor of the turbulent races of men in those stormy six centuries following the fall of Rome's Imperial power, which made her the Mother of all, small and great, wise and simple, in the unmatched days of the cathedral builders and of the great religious orders.

The Middle Ages, like every other period, sinned ; but they were never "dark" as some men have chosen to style them. Always somewhere—in Italy, in a corner of Gaul, in peaceful Ireland sundered by the sea from tempestuous Europe, in Wessex, in York, on the banks of Tyne and Wear, in some remote haunt in Germany, in Seville—the torch of learning burned on, and, as circumstances obliged, was handed from one to another in the time-long human race after light and truth. Learning shone through those centuries like a candle "in a naughty world" ; and it was of them that Newman was thinking when he declared that men who speak against the Church owe it to the Church that they can speak at all.

Long before the seventeenth century Europe had ceased to be even in theory one : the dream of the dually-ruled empire had passed into the reality of a congeries of nations, and in Italy of small states, all, without or with provocation, flying, or ready to fly, at each other's throats.

At the back of the new sceptical, questioning outlook and practice, and, in one way or another, mainly responsible for it, lay the great fermenting fact of the Renaissance. In all human probability modern Europe owes it to the Church that the classics survive : the tale of the rescue of Quintilian's *Institutes* by Poggio Bracciolini, from—the description is his—"a most foul and obscure dungeon at the very bottom of a tower, a place into which condemned criminals would hardly have been thrust,"[1] in the Monastery of S. Gallen, in 1414, is by no means a solitary instance of the peril which great books ran of final destruction.

Little, indeed, must the tiny band of scholars at the end of the fourteenth and beginning of the fifteenth centuries in Italy, (men whose names cannot perish while any one cares for true learning), have dreamed that the classics which they drew forth, here from the care, there from the occasional neglect of sheltering monasteries, would so soon be misused ; that a generation would arise, pedantic, mercenary, materialist, whose aim would be to strip and rob the Church, forgetful or defiant of the fact that it was after all she who had preserved the ancient world's most vital treasures. As the new

[1] Muratori xx. 160. Quoted by J. A. Symonds, *Renaissance in Italy*, vol. ii, ch. iii.

movement gathered force, spreading to Holland, England, France, Switzerland, and parts of Germany, perhaps only Erasmus and Thomas More really grasped the possibility hidden in the heart of the future: and Erasmus had not the temperament nor More the opportunity to stem the rising torrent of materialism backed by the New Learning.

When people rave against the moral corruption of this or that highly-placed Churchman they might spare a moment's reflection on the perils of highly cultivated but cynical and not quite genuine paganism. No one will deny the iniquities of Alexander VI; but it is a nice problem whether such a man or a Leo X does the more damaging and lasting harm to religion, morals, and the ordinary sanctities, decencies and pieties of every-day life. Perhaps too much is too lightly forgiven to the learned and the scientific: the infidelities of the mind may be the most fatal, if the proverb *corruptio optimi pessima est* be really true.

Anyhow, by 1600 Western Europe had grown unfortunately accustomed, hardened even, to religious divisions, to national rivalries, to self interest raised to the level of a creed, to class bitterness, to toleration of the crippling poverty of great masses of the race. Nisard, writing of Erasmus, had said there was "no quiet place, no asylum in Europe where a man could retire and feel alive";

in every country public life was all noise, division, violence, chaos. England, to a considerable extent, shared the fortunes of the Continent, for she had moved a long way since the days when Tacitus could describe this country as an island in the stormy northern ocean beyond which there is nothing. England, for good or for evil, had entered the troubled sphere of European politics, and in her own small compass she reflected the religious and other divisions of that bigger world in which she had now become an important, and was presently to be an increasingly dominant, factor. The simplicity of Rolle's or Mother Julian's environment had passed; moreover, as the new movement spread and grew, the native tendency towards excessive individualism was perpetually reinforced by the almost universally prevalent spirit of self-assertion, of private judgement, of impatience of all and any unquestioned authority.

For all that, mysticism did not perish; and though a divided Church involves loss which no Catholic can deny or fail to deplore, still in seventeenth-century England there sprang up a mysticism of singular beauty, both Roman and Anglo-Catholic. Moreover, an honest student cannot wholly forget the Protestant Bunyan and the Quaker George Fox.

A fair grasp of the movement in the

seventeenth century may be gained by any one who will really trouble to make acquaintance with Father Augustine Baker, Dame Gertrude More, John Donne, the Earl of Manchester, Crashaw, Henry Vaughan, Thomas Browne, and Thomas Traherne. In their several ways, with the possible exception of Vaughan, who was by descent Welsh, these are typically English; and in greater or less degree, genuine mystics.

Father Baker (1575–1641) and John Donne (1573–1631) come nearest to being life-long contemporaries; but the first, the far greater mystic, will ever remain in memory with his spiritual child, Dame Gertrude More.

The loss which controversy necessarily entails is perhaps never more evident than in an hour when we contemplate a group of souls like these. Of them all, Donne, with his enigmatic contradictions, may have suffered most through the break between Rome and Canterbury; but it is a grievous thing that there should exist a shadow of separation between Crashaw and Vaughan, still more between such delightful people as Thomas Browne and Dame Gertrude More.

Probably, to present-day English men and women, Augustine Baker and Gertrude More are less than names. Yet they are not only fundamentally, racially, our very own, not only original and great souls of singular merit,

but they fill a place in the story of English religious life extraordinarily like that which is occupied in the roll of Spanish Mystics by S. Teresa and her great director, S. John of the Cross.

Father Augustine Baker was born at Abergavenny in 1575. When he was fifteen he left Christ's Hospital for Broadgates Hall, now Pembroke College, Oxford. Without taking his degree, he returned home to study law. Pulled up with a moral jerk by a wonderful preservation from a great danger, he began to reflect seriously on the problems of life and death. After instruction from Father Floyd, he was received into the Roman Catholic Church, and, throwing up his law studies, went to a Benedictine Monastery, being eventually clothed in the Abbey of S. Justina at Padua.

At the age of thirty-two he was professed in an Italian Benedictine community domiciled in England, and in 1619, when he was forty-four, he received priest's orders at Reims. Four years later, about Christmastide, another Benedictine, Father Rudeswind Barlow, founded a community of nuns at Cambrai for English women. The Reformation had made it temporarily difficult for communities to exist in England.

It was this convent which brought Father Baker and Dame Gertrude More together.

Dame Gertrude was Blessed Thomas More's great-great-granddaughter,[1] her mother being a Gage of Firle Place, in Sussex. Helen, who in religion took the name Gertrude, was born on the Feast of the Annunciation in 1606. Like S. Teresa, she lost her mother early, and like her, too, was the special care of a devoted father, who himself only abandoned his preparation for the priesthood at his father's entreaty, he being the last man of the More family at liberty to marry.

Inspired by her Benedictine confessor, Helen, with her father's approval, decided to try her vocation. There being no suitable convent in England, Mr. Crisacre More took her and a few other aspirants to the religious life across to Douai, where Helen fell seriously ill. About Michaelmas, she being in her seventeenth year, a move was made to Cambrai, and, as Mr. More, after settling the financial difficulties, was returning to England, the Archbishop of Cambrai placed the little group under the English Benedictine Congregation, with Father

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[1] Sir Thomas More
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John More
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Thomas More
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Crisacre More
|
Dame Gertrude More.

Rudeswind Barlow as their director. At All Hallowstide three nuns came from Brussels to give the new community much-needed, even essential help, so that it became possible for it to be founded formally on Christmas Eve of 1623. On the Feast of the Circumcision the archbishop, assisted by Father Barlow, clothed nine postulants ; the first being Helen More, henceforward to be known as Gertrude. One year later she was professed.

Father Baker tells the chequered story of her early spiritual life as truly, we may believe, as it is possible for one human being to relate another's inner experiences. For details readers must go to that record.[1]

There is a noticeable similarity both in some personal characteristics and in details of environment between S. Teresa and Dame Gertrude. In both cases a somewhat prolonged period of youthful repulsion from life in religion occurred, a repulsion of which they were conscious and which they admitted, however little it was noticed by those about them.

Both of these great saints were contemplatives, and perhaps the contemplative life is as far removed from the life of active religious orders as this is from that kind of well-doing which S. Vincent de Paul's one

[1] *The Inner Life of Dame Gertrude More.* By Father Augustine Baker. (Published by R. & T. Washbourne.)

woman friend, Mademoiselle le Gras, described so wittily : " It is of little good for us to hurry about the streets with bowls of soup and do such service as regards the body, if we do not look on the Son of God as the object of our effort." [1] The parallel must not be regarded as exact nor be pressed too far ; within due limitations it may be suggestive. Anyhow, the supreme height of the contemplative life, together with its rarity, is for ever conveyed in our Lord's verdict : "*Porro unum est necessarium, Maria optimam partem elegit quae non auferetur ab ea.*"

As the nature of contemplative life is perhaps less generally understood in England than once it was, it may be well to quote Father Baker's plain, precise description of it : " When God calls a soul to the religious life, especially in a Contemplative Order, His intention is to perfect her by the Divine guidance and inspirations, to which she should attend and be obedient. For this purpose the religious life is very suitable and even necessary. For external discipline was ordained by S. Benedict and Superiors, partly to enable souls the better to observe the interior Divine impulses which should be the principle and foundation of their internal and external acts ; partly that souls may have the help of Superiors

[1] Quoted on p. 77 of *Vincent de Paul.* By Miss E. K. Sanders.

to dispose themselves by general instructions how to observe and distinguish the Divine impulses ; and finally that Superiors may decide in cases of doubt the source of the inspiration, and distinguish the inspirations of the Holy Ghost from natural and diabolical suggestions. For this end the Church sanctions religious vows, and the soul in making them should have a similar intention. A Superior, therefore, who should utterly neglect and despise inspirations, and regard them as rubbish, will act contrary to the Divine Will, the intention of Holy Church, and the religious state. His principal care should be rather to promote and facilitate such inspirations than to hinder them." [1]

All who care for S. Teresa are aware of her long drawn out, manifold difficulties with confessors and directors who mistook the source and purpose of her "inspirations," as Father Baker calls those direct communications which are the mystic's source of knowledge. S. Teresa says : "In twenty years I sought vainly for a confessor who would understand me." [2]

Again, this time with an explanatory touch, she says : "I understand now that it was in accordance with a special plan of our Lord that for eighteen years I found no spiritual master." [3] With a touch of her inimitable, irrepressible

[1] *The Inner Life*, p. 50. [2] *Autobiography*, ch. iv.
[3] ibid.

fun, she puts her finger on one mistake made by such non-understanding directors, as she protests gently against those who make their penitents "move at the rate of a tortoise, and are content to teach them to go hunting nothing but small lizards," [1] or condemn them always "to walk at a hen's pace." [2]

Dame Gertrude experienced similar difficulties, and for a long while. There can be no doubt that she was a born mystic—perhaps there is no other way of being one—but it is more remarkable in her case because of the curious contradictions of her natural temperament. In the third chapter of *The Inner Life* Father Baker describes five such :—

The most deep-seated and far-reaching was her natural "extroversion." Father Baker explains this to mean a natural "turning outwards" of the intellect and spirit. As he writes : "Extroverted . . . signifies that the eye of the soul is turned upon or taken up with outward things—sensible objects." [3]

Running alongside this state of distributed attention (Father Baker describes her as one "with an active imagination and much prone to talking and recreations and to every kind of interest imaginable" [4]) we find the polar extreme of extroversion in that which Father Baker calls her "propensity" : "God had

[1] ibid., ch. xiii. [2] ibid. [3] p. 13 n. [4] p. 13.

given her, partly by nature, partly by grace, a wonderfully strong propensity in her rational will to seek after God and eternal felicity, and a disesteem or contempt for all the transitory things of this life. But this propensity, though so strong and efficacious, is in its own nature a very profound and spiritual thing and cannot be more fully explained." [1]

Yet, a few pages further on, he makes an attempt at further explanation: "The impulse of the will to elevate itself to God—a matter often referred to by spiritual writers—is nothing else than a natural propensity. And when the person is in a state of grace, and voluntarily exercises the propensity, the Divine Spirit doubtless adds greater vigour to the elevation of the will towards God."[2] Again he writes: "Though the propensity to seek God was in part a natural gift in Dame Gertrude, it does not usually attain its full perfection at once, but ripens with years. In some souls it ripens quicker than in others."[3] He decides that in her case the maturing of this "propensity" was delayed by her equally natural tendency to care for outward things: "The propensity was overwhelmed and smothered by the warm affection she entertained for her friends and kindred."[4] In the closing words of the following passage he

[1] *The Inner Life*, p. 28.
[2] ibid., p. 43.
[3] p. 47.
[4] p. 47.

further elucidates the working of such a "propensity": "The ability to elevate the will, as I have already said, lies in the propensity whose action is intensified by grace and inspiration on the part of God, and by purity of intention on the part of the soul." [1]

The other "natural contradictions" of Dame Gertrude's temperament which Father Baker enumerates are that first she was "very merry yet very much subject to sadness," after all not an uncommon case; next, that she had "a timid, scrupulous conscience, yet had much courage, boldness, and even hardiness"; then, that she "used to oscillate between periods of great and clear internal light and periods of the utmost obscurity." [2]

The fifth is hardly a contradiction, but the fact of it may afford some comfort to a few not wilfully neglectful people, viz. her inability to "meditate," to practise "discursive prayer."

It seems so often now to be taken for granted that every faithful soul should be able to "meditate," and should do it, that it really is consoling to find great saints who cannot. S. Teresa could not: "God has not given me the capacity to discourse with the understanding," [3] she quietly observes, and she attributed this inability to lack of imagination, using the word in its primary sense, as the capacity to

[1] ibid., p. 241. [2] pp. 18, 19. [3] *Autobiography*, ch. iv.

form mental images of absent objects. Neither could Dame Gertrude meditate—Father Baker definitely says so in the third chapter of *The Inner Life*: "She was advised and herself desired to use meditation or discursive prayer, but she found herself utterly unable to do it. Nor did any kind of internal consideration move her affections towards God or help her to pray. And this inability (though in the end it proved to have its advantages) remained with her even till her death. Dame Gertrude's incapacity to meditate did not arise from any want of intelligence. For merely human and natural purposes she could speak with force and ability. And even on spiritual subjects, when thinking over some point, or when discussing it with another, she showed herself both capable and ready in the use of her imagination, tongue, and pen. . . . But when she attempted to turn her abilities to the exercise of meditation, and to move her will by considerations, she was quite at fault, and as unable to do it as if she had no brains at all."

No one must conclude from this that Dame Gertrude lived without "mental" prayer, but only without that kind of it which is called "discursive," the great model of which is the "Ignatian." On the contrary, she declares with emphasis: "For living in religion (as I can speak by experience), if one be not in

a right course of prayer and other exercises between God and our soul, one's nature groweth much worse than ever it would have been if one had lived in the world. For pride and self-love, which are rooted in the soul by sin, find means to strengthen themselves exceedingly in religion, if the soul be not in a course that may teach her and procure her true humility. For by the corrections and contradictions of the will (which cannot be avoided by any living in a religious community) I find my heart grown, as I may say, as hard as a stone; and nothing would have been able to soften it but by being put into a course of prayer, by which the soul tendeth towards God, and learneth of Him the lesson of truly humbling herself." [1]

Her difficulty was to discover the right "course of prayer" for herself. It was just here that the distinctive element in Father Augustine Baker's spiritual teaching came to her aid, when in 1624 he was transferred from Douai to Cambrai. Though the other sisters at once found much help in his teaching, she found none, and indeed she was rather naughty about it sometimes; and, at best, perceiving how his counsels brought peace to some of her sisters, she sighfully exclaimed, "Ah! it is well

[1] *Writings of Dame Gertrude More*, p. 152. (Published by R. & T. Washbourne.)

for you that you can get good from them, for I can get none."

This failure was but one of those innumerable trials and pains which mark the pathway of the saints:—

> Many a blow and biting sculpture
> Polished well those stones elect.

But the moment of relief was at hand. On a certain day in 1625, struck by a passage which Father Baker read to her [1] concerning souls suffering from exceptional aridity, she capitulated and resigned herself unreservedly to his direction, and from that moment made rapid progress in her spiritual life.

It was at the earnest request of this community that Father Baker began to write down his instructions, so that, indirectly, to this small band of nuns the world owes his great mystical and ascetical treatise, *Holy Wisdom*.

From the story of the intercourse of these great mystics, as the one directed the other along the wonderful Way, certain salient points emerge.

First in order of importance, if we will really understand the process, is Father Baker's view of the director's function and office. A good deal of worse than barren controversy might be saved for ever if people who argue about "putting a man between the soul and God"

[1] From Barbanson's *De Semitis Occultis Divini Amoris*.

would take the trouble to inform themselves what genuine "direction" is. Since souls differ widely, it must vary in method; but in kind it is one and the same: "The office of director is not to teach a particular method to the disciple, but to give general instructions by which the soul may get into her interior, and when she has once got there to observe the divine admonitions and guidance, instead of following the methods of books or opinions of others, custom, or what at other times had proved profitable." [1] He then qualifies this slightly: "These observations, however, apply only to souls that have a propensity to the interior, perfect internal senses, and sufficient judgement by which they may distinguish the divine impulses, and what is good and what better for their souls. And many such souls are to be found—both men and women. When once they have been equipped with general instructions, there will be little occasion for the director to busy himself about them, except in the case of some special need, and at the request of the souls themselves. This will be a great relief to the director, and is certainly best for the souls themselves, for they will then yield themselves to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Who is the proper Master of the spiritual life." [2]

[1] *The Inner Life*, p. 73. [2] ibid., p. 74.

In his great treatise he emphasizes this limitation of function : " The necessity of an external instructor is generally only at the beginning of a contemplative course. For, after that souls, by the means of general directions given, and a competent pursuit of internal exercises, have been once put and conveniently settled in a right way how to seek for more light from God alone, they must not out of levity, curiosity, or a foolish proneness to discover their interior, nor without a just necessity, continue to seek instructions from without ; nothing will excuse it but the want of internal light in some special doubtful cases, and then also, they having an internal inspiration and motion to seek it from others ; in which case it is indeed their divine internal Master that they obey, who speaks unto them by the external director appointed them by God." [1]

The next point of importance is his discourse on the several kinds of prayer. In *The Inner Life* Father Baker describes four kinds ; but his account in *Holy Wisdom*, though the classification is different, is rather the more lucid of the two.

After a protest against the customary separation of vocal and mental prayer, he admits that a legitimate distinction between them may

[1] *Holy Wisdom*, Treatise I, § ii, ch. ii. The whole chapter, with its references to the teaching of Walter Hilton and of the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, should be read.

be made: "Prayers may be withal vocally expressed in outward words, the soul attending to the sense of the words pronounced, or at least intending to do so, and this is properly vocal prayer." [1] Next to vocal, he ranks discursive prayer, or "meditation": "in which the understanding is exercised by means of the imagination, in order to raise affections towards God." [2]

It would be hard to explain more clearly and briefly the very essence of meditation than he has done here, yet one cannot help thinking that, out of his own experience, as well as indirectly from spiritual children, Father Baker knew the difficulty some devout and other persons find in the practise of meditation, for once he refers to it as "in time apt to become dry and painful." [3]

The third form of prayer he calls that of *Immediate Acts*, which he describes as an exercise "performed chiefly by the superior will, but not without some use of the imagination and understanding; for in making this act the understanding must use the sensible image of the thing in which the act consists. Still, there is no formal discourse or reasoning; there is merely the apprehension of the matter by the

[1] ibid., Treatise III, § i, ch. i.

[2] ibid. The next chapter further expounds the *nature* of vocal prayer.

[3] p. 61.

understanding, and the main part of the work is done by the will, which produces an efficacious act towards God." [1]

The fourth is the *Prayer of Sensible Affections* : " sensible because the prayer is exercised chiefly in the emotions and senses ; *affection* as distinguished from the understanding, working by the imagination and sensible images." [2]

This form of prayer Father Baker ranks highest of all : " For, as for discursive prayer or meditation, the world is but even burdened with books which with more than sufficient niceness prescribe rules and methods for the practice of it, and with too partial an affection magnify it, the authors of such books neglecting in the meantime, or perhaps scarce knowing what true internal affective prayer is, which notwithstanding is the only efficacious instrument that immediately brings souls to contemplation and perfect union in spirit with God." [3]

As is well known, the Method of Discursive Prayer or Meditation was elaborated and worked out by the founder of the Society of Jesus, and fits in precisely with the highly intellectual and practical aims of the Society. But in a world where an unnumbered company of souls are daily wandering without counsel or guidance there is ample room for other methods too ; and the idealizing, aspiring

[1] p. 62. [2] p. 65. [3] Treatise III, § 1, ch. iii.

Benedictines, whose churches, in their soaring delicacy of line, symbolize the lifted spirit of architects and builders, propounded an intenser, more energetically rapid way of approach. Reason is quick, but Love is swifter far: "the heart has its reasons which Reason does not know."

Yet, with his habitual care to forestall all needless criticism, Father Baker in a long note appended to chapter xi of *The Inner Life* is careful to expound his precise point still a little further, still a little more exactly: "The spirit, in order to work, must have all sensible images, both good and bad, removed. Hence the beginner in a spiritual course commences with the use of good sensible images, and it is impossible to begin in a good spiritual course with the exercises of the spirit. Thus S. Paul says, *Not that which is spiritual comes first, but that which is sensible; afterwards that which is spiritual.* So also S. Bernard: *Miraculous is the contemplation which is not founded upon precedent meditation.* And by meditation he means any good exercise in which sensible images are used. Hence the four ways of praying suitable for beginners here given are all founded upon the principal use of sensible images. Those souls who have not a propensity to the interior must abide always in the exercises in which sensible images are used, and these souls will find the sensible exercises very profitable

to themselves and to others and pleasing to God. And this is the way of the active life. But others who have the propensity to the interior do not always remain in the exercises of the senses, but after a time these will give place to the exercises of the spirit, which are independent of the senses and the imagination and consist simply in the elevation of the will of the intellective soul to God. . . . The soul elevates her will towards God, apprehended by the understanding as a spirit, and not as an imaginary thing, the human spirit in this way aspiring to a union with the Divine Spirit." [1]

The reader who desires to grasp adequately Father Baker's spiritual teaching should read, more than once, the third treatise of *Holy Wisdom*, where, though, as I have said, the division is not quite the same as that in *The Inner Life*, yet the whole subject of the various kinds of prayer is made as clear as human words allow, for, after all, S. Hilary's plangent reflection still holds : "We are compelled to entrust the deep things of God to the perils of human expression."

Great and insurmountable as those perils are, it has seemed worth while to dwell at length on this vital question of prayer ; for possibly, nowadays, at least in some quarters of England, meditation is spoken of as if it were

[1] *The Inner Life*, pp. 67–8, note.

the beginning, middle, and end of the spiritual life, and is being urged on all and sundry with more zeal than knowledge and delicate discrimination.

After the director's function, and after this explanation of the several kinds of prayer, the third point of importance is surely the special difficulties of the soul under direction. Father Baker gives two accounts of Dame Gertrude's natural temperament, and of the difficulties arising out of it. The first occurs in the fifth chapter, but that in the thirteenth is the more illuminating. He writes there: "From what has been said it will be easily understood how unfit for Dame Gertrude were the usual instructions found in books for the guidance of souls about indifferent matters, yet the right use of them belongs to the very essence of the spiritual life. Suppose, for instance, her director had told her to make meditation, or use immediate acts or vocal prayer: none of these would have suited her. Or if she had been able to use them for a time, she would have to be taught when she ought to abandon them for contemplation. But no creature could teach her this in particular; she must seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit and observe His light and attractions. Or again, if a director had told her to keep her mind actually attentive to God while engaged in external employments as far as they would

permit, and never to suffer any thoughts to enter her mind or abide there which had not reference to God, but always to keep her mind intent on Him, or on the humanity of our Saviour, it would only have hindered her progress. Then for her exterior, if he had told her that she should ever be in solitude, save when obedience required otherwise, that she should always observe silence, except when spoken to, or when some necessary business required her to speak, and not one word further, that she should always keep her eyes modestly cast down, and observe nothing but what obedience required, that she should refrain from conversing at the grate or in the house except at the call of obedience . . . that from the very beginning of her spiritual course she should aspire to total abstraction and recollection of life . . . in a word, if she had been told that she should live the life of an angel on earth . . . it would certainly have been destructive to both her mind and body. Yet these and similar instructions are to be found in books and in the writings of even the holiest men. But in the case of Dame Gertrude how inapt would have been such instructions! They would in no way have promoted her spiritual progress. Indeed she would and could not have put them in practice. If she had attempted it she most certainly would have gone out of her wits, or utterly ruined

her health, and confounded and obscured her soul by it."

The first impression produced by this passage may possibly be that Father Baker had allowed his natural gift of satire to run away with him. As a matter of fact it is not satirical, but a draught of that plain, sane sense which the devout not infrequently need. Exaggeration is at least as possible in the spiritual life as elsewhere, and nowhere can it be more harmful. Dame Gertrude, as God had made her, possessed alert senses, alert wits. Father Baker, like the humane, wise, discriminating saint that he was, eschewed cutting blocks with a razor. Because she was utterly unfit to do certain things, that did not mean she was to do nothing; because certain methods would have driven her into an asylum, that did not mean that no self-sacrificing, self-disciplining, strenuous efforts were required of her.

"C'est à voix basse que se transmet normalement la tradition mystique," Père Bremond observes;[1] and it was by the long neglected, at last accepted, but always sparse and economic counsels of Father Baker that her harassed soul came to find her right Way—not right for all and sundry, since no such Way exists—but for her: "In her case the suitable method was not by any discourse of her imagination, nor by

[1] op. cit., p. 69.

the use of sensible devotions, but merely the exercise of affections, either as her propensity moved her to do it by herself, or as she chose herself out of a book, or by custom, or from memory. . . . And by this means she came to have ordinarily a very efficacious prayer, accompanied by much recollection and internal sight of herself, through which she was enabled to discover her inordinate affections and other defects, and also to obtain through grace great strength of will for their amendment. Moreover, this method of prayer afforded her a good interior light, and in conjunction with the propensity of her will, which was constant and much intensified by Divine grace, fully satisfied all the needs of her soul."[1]

The responsibility laid on any director of souls is overwhelmingly heavy. But in the case of those to whom it falls to guide such temperaments as Dame Gertrude's it is exceptionally so, for the quick energy which refuses so uncompromisingly that which is, or seems, unsuitable, obeys as whole-heartedly what it accepts at all, and, whatever partially informed critics may urge, is no respecter of persons: "those who truly endeavour to please Thee would obey a worm if it could command in the Name and power of Thee,"[2] she emphatically declares.

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[1] *The Inner Life*, pp. 28–9.

[2] *Writings* of Dame Gertrude. Seventh Confession, p. 26.

The fourth point to be noted is this "advice" which Father Baker gave "à voix basse." But he did not stop short at advice concerning prayer: "Prayer is not the only matter of importance in the spiritual life. There is another thing of almost equal consequence, and this is mortification."[1] His instructions on Mortification were brief: "First, that she should do all that belonged to her to do by any law, human or Divine. . . . Secondly, that she was to refrain from those things that were forbidden her by human or Divine Law, or by Divine inspirations. Thirdly, that she should bear with as much patience or resignation as possible all crosses and contradictions to her natural will, which were inflicted by the hand of God. Such, for instance, were aridities, temptations, afflictions or bodily pain, sickness and infirmity; or again, loss of honour or esteem, unkindness, neglect; or again, the loss of friends or want of necessaries and comforts. All this was to be endured patiently, whether the crosses came direct from God or by means of His creatures."[2]

He adds, with a touch of that terse wit which often glances across his most serious pages: "These indeed were mortifications enough for Dame Gertrude or for any other soul, and there was no need for any one to advise or

[1] *The Inner Life*, p. 75. [2] ibid., p. 76.

impose others."[1] But just as he perceived that in the matter of prayer some are not only helped by "sensible images," but actually need them, so he perceived that there may be persons so far removed from ordinary sources of mortification that they need to hunt about for the "imposed" sort or to have such definitely provided them, who require that additional fastings, greater almsgivings, scourges and other devices be appointed or made for them: while he exempted Dame Gertrude, knowing well enough that her quick temperament would suffer abundantly beneath her whole-hearted endurance of those diurnal crosses which came "directly from God or by means of His creatures." Similarly, in a later chapter, he writes: "A person of more robust constitution could have borne more violent mortifications, but Dame Gertrude must be taken as God made her."[2] In the twenty-second chapter of *The Inner Life* Father Baker tells us that "the excessive natural activity of Dame Gertrude's senses was in the latter part of her life much abated." Then "introversion" had become easier and much more frequent, and this of course was the effect of Divine grace and her own prayer and self-mortification. As Father Baker penetratingly remarks, "In the affairs

[1] p. 77. [2] p. 94.

of this world natural abilities serve to bring things to their intended issue. But in supernatural matters, as the spiritual good of the soul, natural abilities are utterly insufficient . . . natural ability must wholly accommodate itself to Divine impulses, behaving as an instrument of the Holy Spirit, and not as an independent worker." [1]

It is just over this total self-surrender that so many stumble. If Dame Gertrude was not called upon to suffer the same degree of prolonged and exquisite physical pain as S. Teresa, for example, yet she was burdened with many bodily disabilities: with both spiritual and mental pain she was very familiar.

In health and prosperity it is easy to enlarge on the disciplinary value and even on the absolute necessity of pain; indeed, without it a saint could hardly be fashioned, and the men of sorrows are the men of efficacy in all the affairs of life and death.

But the reminder may not be useless, lest the unwary be misled, that when the saints "rejoice in pain" they are not, at least some are not, relieved from it. It still is pain. Such a prayer as that attributed to S. Ignatius may be said often, with wholly sincere intent—"*Suscipe Domine universam meam libertatem. Accipe memoriam, intellectum atque voluntatem omnem.*

[1] ibid., p. 202.

Quidquid habeo, vel possideo, mihi largitus es, id tibi totum restituo ac tuæ prorsus voluntati trado gubernandum. Amorem tui solum cum gratia tua mihi dones, et dives sum satis, nec aliud quidquam ultra posco." But, in agonizing illness with its consequent restraint and disablement, in overwhelming sorrow or torturing anxiety, the faltering will and hesitating tongue sufficiently prove what it costs really to mean it.

At the same time we must not forget that such great simple souls exist as those whom Fénelon described : "Elles ne pensent point à bien souffrir ; mais insensiblement chaque croix se trouve portée jusqu'au bout dans une paix simple et amère, où elles n'ont voulu que ce que Dieu vouloit. Il n'y a rien d'éclatant, rien de fort, de distinct aux yeux d'autrui, et encore moins aux yeux de la personne. Si vous lui disiez qu'elle a bien souffert elle ne le comprendroit pas." Sometimes to physical suffering is added that last misery, aridity, utter dereliction. Then we may well remember S. Teresa's letter to Father Gracian : "Do not suppose that one who suffers does not pray ; he prays since he offers his sufferings to God, and often far better than one who is racking his brains in solitude, and who fancies if he manages to wring out a few tears that this is prayer." [1]

[1] *The Letters* of S. Teresa. Translated by the Benedictines of Stanbrook. Vol. ii, p. 97.

As Dame Gertrude persevered in the manner of prayer recommended by Father Baker, many "affective acts," chosen by her from "my beloved S. Augustine" and other books, were written down and scattered about the house. These, eventually, were collected and published by Father Baker. The original title was *Holy Practices of a Divine Lover*, but Father Baker christened them *The Idiot's*[1] *Devotions*. A great collection of such Immediate Acts or Affections may be found at the end of Father Baker's own treatise, *Holy Wisdom*.

Some one may ask, What has all this to do with mysticism? Just this. The mystic's *aim* is direct union with God. Thus Dame Gertrude cries: "When shall I without all mean[2] be united to Thee?"[3] And so in this particular case the answer is that, obeying her own "propensity," helped by Father Baker's counsel, she practised the way of affective prayer and mortification—"the way of the spirit is a secret, mystic way, and is not to be discovered save by a Divine internal light, obtained by means of prayer, and pursued with a corresponding degree of mortification"[4]—

[1] Using the word idiot in its original Greek sense of layman, amateur, private person.

[2] i.e. directly, immediately, without intervention of sense or imagination.

[3] *Writings* of Dame Gertrude More, p. 55.

[4] *The Inner Life*, p. 78.

until "by means of prayer Dame Gertrude received a great measure of light."[1] So at last she writes herself, thus showing the relation between external direction, inner effort, and illumination: "All the spiritual men in the world are not able by their instructions to make another, that yet of herself may be most apt for it, become truly spiritual, unless the scholar herself do withal carefully observe and pursue the foresaid lights and calls as her *primum mobile*, or first mover. . . .

"For God, and none but He, is the true and immediate teacher and director in the most obscure and supernatural way of contemplation. . . . Simple and unlearned souls, by the said light, come to find out those internal ways, most obscure of themselves, which no man, though never so learned and acutely witted, can discern or find out of himself."[2] There speaks the true mystic; there is "the flight of the alone to the Alone," there is the true illumination which Thomas à Kempis craved for: "*Loquere, Domine, quia audit servus tuus. Non loquatur mihi Moyses aut aliquis ex prophetis: sed tu, potius loquere, Domine Deus, inspirator et illuminator omnium prophetarum; quia tu solus sine iis potes me perfecte imbuere: illi autem sine Te nihil proficient.*"[3]

S. Teresa warns us again and again that no

[1] ibid., p. 81. [2] *Writings*, pp. 233–4.
[3] *De Imit. Christi*, iii. ii. i.

one can produce or retain by sheer act of will illumination or union. The supernal vision comes and lasts as God wills, and is given to whom God wills. Similarly here, Dame Gertrude tells us that human wit will never discern nor find it.

If any one will read the last sublime chapter of *Holy Wisdom*, the one entitled *Of the State of Perfection*, he will not only realize the truth of this, but he may find himself comparing the intense vision of this too-much-forgotten English Benedictine with Dante's great revelation in the *Paradiso*.

Those who wish to penetrate the inmost secret of these two great mystics must go to their own writings, and live close to them; but to forestall needless criticism, it may be well to add here a few words on the subject of individualism and influence. A casual reader of Father Baker's writings might possibly bring against him the charge which was actually made during his lifetime, viz. that he sometimes set aside "accepted" views, and even seemed to think lightly of the methods of superiors. With this Dame Gertrude dealt, at some length, in her *Apology*, observing that the same charge was levelled at him as at our Lord;[1] and her simple answer is: "He has taught me true submission and subjection of myself to

[1] S. Luke xx. 23.

God, and to whomsoever He puts over me in this life, with as great a contempt of myself as my frailty can reach unto." [1]

To those who imagine that direction is or may be "unwholesome," perhaps Dame Gertrude's plain statement may bring some help and enlightenment: "This, therefore, was that which made me so esteem Father Baker's instructions at first when he delivered them, because I saw that they were grounded upon God (not upon him) Who could never fail, whatsoever became of him." [2]

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[1] *Apology* (Writings, p. 210). [2] ibid., p. 225.

CHAPTER V

Anglo-Catholic Mystics and Others

AS we turn to the group of Anglo-Catholics, Thomas Browne, John Donne, Vaughan, and do not wholly forget that unusual occupant of the seat of the Chief Justice of the King's Bench, Henry Montagu, 1st Earl of Manchester, we cannot but perceive in greater or less degree some of the losses immediately consequent on the Reformation—the loss of serene security, of accepted certainty. Of course people may say that these can be bought at too high a price, but that contention involves the admission that they have a price.

An obvious result of controversy is almost invariably, and that on both sides, the exaggeration of differences. In their reforming zeal some of the authorities of the Church of England seem to have wished to destroy not only the priestly authority (which, all the while, they explicitly retained in the Ordinals), but also priestly counsel and guidance ; while the practice of ascetic discipline, for a while, seems hardly to have survived save here and there in remote places.

If we consider the visible efficacy, to say nothing of all which was bound to remain unseen, of the spiritual teaching of so highly trained a director as Father Baker, then we may begin to realize what was lost by Anglo-Catholics when deliberate provision for training priests in the intimate guidance of souls was neglected. Of course this, like every great service which one mortal renders to another, is partly a matter of gifts ; but also, in no small measure, its success depends on the due training of such gifts.

What might not have been further developed of high and peculiar sanctity, say in Sir Thomas Browne, had he come face to face with such teaching as Father Baker's or that of such contemporaries in France as Pères Lallemant and Jean Rigoleuc, as these two counselled men on "guardianship of the heart" ? Suppose to his natural sagacity, to his *anima naturaliter christiana* he had added a training enabling him, not like Montaigne, "to draw himself at full length and naked," but to perceive fully "un nouveau monde . . . un grand théâtre où trois sortes d'esprits, celui de Dieu, celui de la chair et le malin esprit paraissent sans cesse, ou tous ensemble ou séparément, comme un champ de bataille, où ces trois esprits combattent sans trêve pour la conquête de notre âme." [1] Sup-

[1] Henri Bremond, *Histoire Littéraire du Sentiment Religieux en France*, vol. v, cc. I and II.

pose he had been adjured "to stand sentinel" over his inner life "and let God act." [1]

The tragic reign of Charles I witnessed the publication of three of the most beautiful and individual prose Essays in Theology written in English: *Contemplation of Death and Immortality* (commonly known as *Manchester al Mondo*), by Henry Montagu, 1st Earl of Manchester, and the *Religio Medici* of Thomas Browne, which was followed in 1650 by his *Hydriotaphia* or *Urn-Burial.*

Litera scripta manet is a warning sometimes given by lawyers to over-impulsive clients; but this Chief Justice of the King's Bench has left us matter written which in its unworldly incaution will, one fancies, not only "remain" as long as English and Latin are intelligible to human beings, but will blossom in perpetuity, through its fragrant influence on not a few lives who come to enjoy the immortality of which it speaks.

Having reflected that "the Fathers" taught men to regard with careful consideration "The Four Last Things, Heaven and Hell, Death and Judgement," and that some souls, loving Contemplation as well as he did, have "fixed upon the Love of God; some upon the Passion of Christ, some upon the joyes of heaven; some upon contempt of the world, several

[1] ibid.

others upon divers other subjects," [1] he himself will make his special choice, since time seems to press: "Considering I had passed so much imployment, so many offices, so long practice in several professions . . . I now thought it time to seize on death before it seized on mee." [2]

And so his main treatise is on death, which "is but a dormitory for a day." [3]

Manchester is a striking exception to that kind of dubiety which permeates so much of the English seventeenth century. Wherever, from whomever he derived his instruction, he knew the mystics' standpoint, and he separated, in their accustomed fashion, the functions of the intellect and the heart: "We meditate to know God, we contemplate to love God. . . . Meditation considers her objects peece by peece, but Contemplation summes them altogether. . . . Meditation is with a man as he that smells a Violet, the Rose, the Jessamine, and the Orange flowers individually . . . but Contemplation is a water compounded of them all." [4]

Perhaps every reader of this little book would be struck first by the author's vividness of imagination: consideration after consideration is introduced with a lively image: "Every

[1] *Manchester al Mondo*, p. 4. (Published by Oxford University Press, 1902.)
[2] ibid., p. 5. [3] p. 15. [4] pp. 5–6.

one is here set Centinel, and not to leave the place till his Captaine call him off" ;[1] a cheerier view than Plato's : "There is a doctrine whispered in secret that man is a prisoner who has no right to open the door of his prison and run away."[2] A solemn point Manchester drives in with a homely picture, familiar still to Sussex Down-folk : "If the Oxe loweth when his fellow is taken from him that drew the plough with him, *qualem mugitum* shall we give when soule and body part."[3] And once again, "Begin not thou to turne to God when thou canst not turne thee in thy bed."[4]

No one, I think, could call *Manchester al Mondo* a mystical treatise, though he possesses so plainly that distinctive gift of the mystics of never mistaking the shell for the kernel. In essence the book is a long-drawn-out series of reflections and counsels on such a manner of life as will not allow a man to be taken unawares by death—*a morte improvisa et subitanea, Domine libera nos* being its unwritten motto ; nevertheless the fundamental texture of the author's spirit is mystical : "*Qui praedixit, Reviscit*, and this hath wrought it. Humane wisdome cannot comprehend this. Weake faith lookes for meanes, and is put to shifts when she sees them faile ; and yet Reason ministers helpe to Faith, though it be no ground of Faith.

[1] ibid., p. 29. [2] *Phaedo*, § 62.
[3] *Manchester al Mondo*, p. 48. [4] ibid., p. 73.

Nam fides non tollit, sed potius extollit rationem. Reason, the chiefest peece of man, would but cannot reach so high. Grace that hath taken up her seat in the Soule, makes Reason see what Nature cannot, and yet man, doe what he can, is still apt to seeke a reason why he should believe. But Omnipotencie, which works by improbabilities, tels us there is no strong faith where there is apparant meanes. Difficulties and improbabilities are the proper objects of faith. *Crede, quod non vides, et videbis quod non credis* . . . faith is not faith if reason comprehend it ; Faith and Reason have their limits ; where Reason ends Faith begins."[1]

But in the fourth and concluding division of the little book, heading the short chapter with this title in capitals—*The Rapture of the Sovle*—he gives full rein to his mysticism. It is but four pages all told ; yet the following passages prove that Henry Montagu was as genuine a mystic as Dame Gertrude herself : " *Rapitur Anima cum coelestia contemplatur, et contemplando jucundatur.* This is a kind of Arreption to Heaven ; when a man abstracts himself from earth, and by contemplation grows into acquaintance with God, for then he seemes to converse with God, and become *divinae particeps naturae*, then he sends forth strong emanations of Divine love. Those *affectiones*

[1] p. 56.

extaticae are the signals, *Amoris liquidi; liquescit animo, cum devotione calescit.* Such love suffers not me to be a lover of myself. . . . Let him kisse mee with the kisses of His mouth, so begins that *Canticum Canticorum.* . . . This *fruitivus Amor*, by Divine rapture, unites me to God. . . .

"And because sight increases delight, Therefore Rapture would faine ascend to Vision, *Videre illa, non quae videntur, sed quae non videntur.* . . . The Soule being thus powerfully attracted by the inducements of so faire and divine delights, Shee on her part corresponds, and with a willing assent glides after these attracts, and as a vapour exhaled by the Sunne, she goes out of her selfe, and would willingly draw the body with her, but that substance is too sad; wherefore she quits it as not agill, nor sprightful enough to soare so high. . . . The will takes pleasure to perceive the understanding (which is the Soules King) taken into Rapture; and when the faculties both of will and understanding doe intercommunicate their ravishments, then are we sweetly brought into divine extasie, in which state man feels nothing of the Humane, but dyes in his life, and lives in his death. Of this second extasie the Seraphicall Divines make three sorts; one of understanding, a second of affection, a third of action. Action is added, because a man is not to be above

himself in Contemplation, and under himselfe in conversation. The first of the three is *in splendore*; the second *in fervore*; the third *in labore*; the one caused by admiration; the other by devotion, the last by operation."[1]

Probably the bulk of Manchester's compatriots now are as unfamiliar with his name as with his book; they may be more familiar with Sir Thomas Browne's name if his work be little known, for this Norwich physician combined with his own marked individuality some of the stately philosophy of Bacon and the friendly naïf confidentialness of Michel de Montaigne.

From his least unknown book, the *Religio Medici*, which he described as "rather a memorial unto me than an Example or Rule unto any other,"[2] and as "a sense of my conceptions at that time,[3] not an immutable Law unto my advancing Judgement at all times,"[4] we may gather his own religious standpoint, and at the same time realize the growth of private judgement in authority's proper sphere, and the fluidity of opinion and belief which followed the religious upheaval in England. With Sir Thomas Browne we begin to hear plainly, in spite of his delightful charm, and genuine

[1] ibid., pp. 116–18.

[2] *Religio Medici*, edited by W. A. Greenhill, p. 4. (Macmillan, 1885.)

[3] *circa* 1635. [4] op. cit., p. 5.

pietas, the note of "our unhappy divisions." Most urbane of controversialists, he announces without hesitation, "I dare without usurpation assume the honourable stile of a Christian." Then at once follows the admission of the grievous rent in the Church, yet he has no intention of renouncing his allegiance to the Catholic Faith: "To be particular, I am of that Reformed, new-cast Religion, wherein I dislike nothing but the Name; of the same belief our Saviour taught, the Apostles disseminated, the Fathers authorized, and the Martyrs confirmed: but by the sinister ends of Princes, the ambition and avarice of Prelates, and the fatal corruption of times, so decayed, impaired, and fallen from its native Beauty that it required the careful and charitable hands of these times to restore it to its primitive Integrity." [1]

Though, with that perception which can come long after the event, some of us may see that the "restoration" was less satisfactory than he thought, and the hands less careful and charitable sometimes than he believed, no competent reader can mistake his earnest conviction that he belonged to the one Church founded by our Lord, built up and consolidated by Apostles, Doctors, and Martyrs, nor his deliberate desire so to belong. His love

[1] *Religio Medici*, p. 8.

for his "absent brethren," from whom he had been unhappily divided, is no less apparent: "We have reformed from them not against them . . . there is between us one common Name and Appellation, one Faith and necessary body of Principles common to us both; and therefore I am not scrupulous to converse and live with them, to enter their Churches in defect of ours, and either pray with them or for them." [1] Wherefrom it is evident that Anglo-Catholicism is not, as some seem to suppose, a thing of recent invention.

Among English writers, Sir Thomas Browne has that sauntering, half-irrelevant, almost disconnected method of thought and expression which made Montaigne so effectual and persuasive. This quality makes it useless to attempt to find in his writings a symmetrical or even ordered system of mystical doctrine; and probably his practice was not more systematic. For all that he was of the mystical temperament; and his tendency escapes, consciously or unconsciously it is hard to tell which, as his pen follows his leisurely, straying thought, and shows itself in his intuitive perceptions, his capacity to penetrate the outer appearance and arrive at reality. Sometimes, indeed, his attention is so concentrated upon the matter in hand that all recollection of possible readers,

[1] ibid., p. 9.

an audience of any kind, seems to vanish, and he is like one thinking aloud. Again, he has the mystics' tendency to rate the unseen above the seen. Many will give a conventional assent to the superiority of the spiritual to the material, and straightway belie it by their habits and actions. But Sir Thomas Browne is not of their company. Writing of one who has reached old age, he says: "Having been long tossed in the Ocean of this World, he will by that time feel the In-draught of another, unto which this seems but preparatory, and without it of no high value. He will experimentally find the Emptiness of all things, and the nothing of what is past; and wisely grounding upon true Christian expectations, finding so much past, will wholly fix upon what is to come. He will long for Perpetuity, and live as though he made haste to be happy. The last may prove the prime part of his Life, and those his best days which he lived nearest Heaven." [1] The above passage, as well as the next one quoted here, shows that he possesses that other mystical gift of grasping the unity of existence, of realizing the connection of all things with their Creator: "Forget not the capital [2] end, and frustrate not the opportunity of once Living. . . . Upon a curricle in this World depends a long course of the next,

[1] *Christian Morals*, Pt. iii.

[2] chief, which like the head (caput) crowns all.

and upon a narrow Scene here an endless Expansion hereafter. In vain some think to have an end of their Beings with their Lives. Things cannot get out of their natures, or be or not be in despite of their constitutions. Rational existences in Heaven perish not at all, and but partially on Earth: that which is thus once will in some measure be always; the first living human Soul is still alive. . . . Though it looks but like an imaginary kind of Existency to be before we are; yet since we are under the decree or prescience of a sure and Omnipotent Power, it may be somewhat more than a non-entity to be in that Mind unto which all things are present." [1]

Whether or not he wrote the following passage meaning it to be taken mystically, it can easily be so read: "Tread softly and circumspectly in this funambulous [2] Track and narrow Path of Goodness; pursue Virtue virtuously. . . .

"Consider whereabout thou art in Cebes his *Table*, or that old philosophical Pinax of the Life of Man; whether thou art still in the Road of Uncertainties; whether thou hast yet entered the narrow Gate, got up the Hill and asperous Way, which leadeth unto the House of Sanity, or taken that purifying Potion from the hand of a sincere Erudition which may

[1] *Christian Morals*, pp. 224–7.
[2] Like a dancer's tight-rope.

send thee clear and pure away unto a virtuous and happy Life." [1]

Though it is almost certain that Sir Thomas Browne borrowed some of these most noticeable phrases (e.g. asperous Way, purifying Potion, from Cebes' [2] *Pinax*, which in the seventeenth century was used as a text-book in schools), they are still patient, and in his use of them suggestive, of a mystical meaning: they may signify Purgation along a steep and stony path, Illumination from pure Knowledge, and Union at last. That his intention here was mystical is made more probable by the closing words of *Christian Morals* and by the last paragraph but one of *Urn-Burial*. The two passages closely resemble but also complete one another. The first from *Christian Morals* runs thus: "If (as we have elsewhere declared) any have been so happy as personally to understand Christian Annihilation, Extasy, Exolution, Transformation, the Kiss of the Spouse, and Ingression into the Divine Shadow, according to Mystical Theology, they have already had an handsome Anticipation of Heaven; the World is in a manner over, and the Earth in Ashes with them."

The passage from "elsewhere," that is from *Urn-Burial*, seems to refer definitely to past mystics; it also adds a notable mystical phrase,

[1] *Letter to a Friend*, op. cit., p. 147.

[2] A disciple of Socrates.

while omitting the definite reference in *Christian Morals* to Mystical Theology : "Pious spirits who passed their days in raptures of futurity, made little more of this world than the world that was before it, while they lay obscure in the chaos of pre-ordination, and night of their fore-beings. And if any have been so happy as truly to understand Christian annihilation, ecstacies, exolution, liquefaction, transformation, the kiss of the spouse, gustation of God, and ingression into the divine shadow, they have already had an handsome anticipation of Heaven ; the glory of the world is surely over, and the earth in ashes unto them."

Finally, in estimating his claim to the mystical temper, we must not forget a sentence in *Urn-Burial* : "Life is a pure flame, and we live by an invisible Sun within us."

Speaking from a philosophical rather than from a theological point of view, the essence of mysticism can be analysed into a capacity to pierce through appearance to the underlying reality ; a tendency to synthesis, to perception that all things are finally related to each other in a greater whole ; a subordination—no more than that, emphatically not an abolition—of the intellectual side of human nature to the volitional and emotional, and finally an apprehension which is direct, not mediated nor mediable through any intervening channel.

Expressed in such terms mysticism becomes

at least intelligible in its nature to men of any religion or none; much, little, or not at all as any one of them may be a mystic himself.

When the condition is thus reduced to its elements, a man like Sir Thomas Browne falls naturally into the category of the mystics. But Vaughan enters by a higher claim. Though perhaps we cannot picture him begging that strange assortment of garments, and making out of them a curious "habit," we can, if we have any sympathy at all, perceive that no unbridgeable chasm separated him from so typical an English Mystic as "Richard Hermit."

Both alike saw through the veil to the Presence, both, with their sincere simplicity, stretched out their confident hands till at last they grasped Reality.

Sometimes Vaughan is regarded as if he were exclusively a religious poet; but this kind of penetration can be discerned even in his secular poems, as, e.g., in his address to Seneca, as he lingered in the Bodleian Library and saw his *Letters* there :—

> But what care I to whom thy *Letters* be?
> I change the name and thou dost write to me;
> And in this Age as sad almost as thine,
> Thy stately consolations are mine.

That is not mysticism, but the temper of mind

which could realize such a fact has in it that ability to grip the core, without which no one can be a mystic.

There are facts which give Vaughan a right to rank highly among the mystics, to have a place among the greatest of them. When we consider his age, his circumstances, his natural liveliness of temper, we cannot but admit that, humanly speaking, he had practically nothing to help him and everything to hinder. If ever any one were directly taught of God, surely he was. He had no human director; the Church which he loved had fallen on some of the worst days of persecution. It is not too much to say that he hated Puritanism, yet he was forced to see the parish churches near him deprived of their priests, and, if open at all, given over to self-consecrated and often illiterate preachers. There seemed no mediating channel left for him, no refuge till he fell into "the everlasting Arms."

By the days of Vaughan's youth the Church of England had steadied after the great disruption, and the time of recovery had definitely begun. Until the Civil War broke up the peace again he was familiar with the authoritative doctrine and discipline, the decent and stately ritual which obtained under Laud; the catholic, fragrant devotion of Lancelot Andrewes was enriching the Church. In spite of the disastrous consequences of controversy

and of all the losses and misery of divisions, Catholics could point to the work of restoration already effected. Men cannot, in England any more than elsewhere, gather figs from thistles ; the *Preces Privatae* of Lancelot Andrewes never sprang, never could spring, from a Puritan root.

In the miserable rupture between Rome and Canterbury something bigger is needed than a rigorous logic, at least something as large as a theory which will cover all the facts on both sides.

It is very easy to call the Church of England schismatic or heretical, or both ; it is very easy to deny her claim to Catholicism ; but such abrupt performances do not cover all the facts. No one knows her failures and gaps better than those who, loving her still, suffer from them ; but two facts remain—she has always in every age bred up some Catholics, and men do not gather figs from thistles. After all, she is not alone in her imperfections. Were there, in Christendom, a body against which no grave fault or failure could be urged, those of the Ecclesia Anglicana might seem not only more glaring, but more decisive than they do. As things are, it is evident that in every generation, however rough their way, however vulnerable their position to ridicule and scorn, however chastened their opportunities, men and women have lived and died in the

Church of England — like Herbert and Andrewes, Bramhall and Vaughan, the Non-jurors, the Community of Little Gidding, the Tractarians with all those whose names, many as they are, are unknown, men and women whose view resembled that of Dean Church when he wrote : "The English Church, after all, was as well worth living in and fighting for as any other. It was not only in England that light and dark in teaching and in life was largely intermingled, and the mixture had largely to be allowed for. We had our Sparta, a noble, if a rough and incomplete one ; patiently to do our best for it was better than leaving it to its fate, in obedience to signs and reasonings which the heat of strife might well make delusive." [1] The Roman Catholic admission that our Lord "has many sheep outside His fold whom personally He cares for, yet He acknowledges but one fold, and would that all were within it. He may give guidance to individuals without, but to her alone He gives *corporate* guidance," [2] must not be forgotten, since it gives an answer to the argument based on the image of figs from thistles. But it does not at all adequately deal with the Anglo-Catholics' original claim, at the very moment of the break, to retain

[1] R. W. Church, *The Oxford Movement*, pp. 346–7.

[2] Father Leslie J. Walker, S.J., *The Problem of Reunion*, p. 215.

their catholicity; nor their constant struggle throughout the centuries against encroaching Protestantism; nor the nineteenth century's signal Catholic Revival. The fact is clear that neither the Eastern Orthodox nor the Anglican Communions repudiated their Catholic Past; they definitely clung to it. The Protestant bodies repudiated theirs. Had this one fact been generally admitted all along, perhaps the worst spiritual effects of controversy might have been avoided; perhaps before now Unity might have been restored. To face facts, all the facts, on all the sides, and to face them squarely, is perhaps more likely to bring about the realization of our Lord's high-priestly prayer than political deals and theological compromises, and there is a Parable about wheat and tares.

However that may be, if ever an Anglo-Catholic mystic existed after the Reformation, Henry Vaughan was one; and, as I have said, he was so in the most apparently unpromising circumstances.

In the first place he did not, could not take things easily, or "suffer fools gladly." By nature he was that uncomfortable mixture, a partisan without any taste for fighting. A dense world sees too little and that too dimly, to perceive that a person may be "ever a fighter" without having the slightest taste for strife; and the seventeenth century had little of

our present-day complacence which too often thinks that only self-interest is a sufficient ground for resisting injustice and wrong. Like Erasmus, Vaughan needed an occasional retreat from the "strife of tongues"; only from men of their temper could come that wearied apostrophe—

> Lord, what a busie, restlesse thing
> Hast Thou made man!

Like Erasmus, he found his lot cast in days of tumult and riot. Like Erasmus, he loved good company, that is the friends of his choice, and was less fortunate, being deprived of so many by war and persecution. His poetry is full of the praise of solitary peace, yet little was vouchsafed him. Sometimes he found respite, and of Sundays he could say :—

> Bright shadows of true Rest! some shootes of blisse;
> Heaven once a week,
> The next world's gladness prepossest in this
> A day to seek
> Eternity in time.

Into the poem called *Retirement* he put his longing for the country's peace and purity :—

> But rural shades are the sweet sense
> Of piety and innocence;
> They are the meek's calm region, where
> Angels descend and rule the sphere;
> Where Heaven lies leaguer, and the Dove
> Duly as dew comes from above.
> If Eden be on earth at all,
> 'Tis that which we the country call.

This desire for peace may account too for his love for night's silence, a singular trait in the seventeenth century which was a little prone to connect darkness with death :—

Dear night ! this world's defeat ;
The stop to busie fools ; care's check and curb ;
The day of spirits ; my soul's calm retreat
Which none disturb !
Christ's progress and His prayer-time
The hours to which high Heaven doth chime.

God's silent, searching flight ;
When my Lord's head is filled with dew, and all
His locks are wet with the clear drops of night ;
His still, soft call ;
His knocking time ; the soul's dumb watch,
When spirits their fair kinred catch.

But beyond these, beautiful as the last is, the poem called *Peace* brings to us the intensity of his feeling :—

My soul there is a countrie
Afar beyond the stars,
Where stands a wingéd Sentrie
All skilfull in the wars.
There above noise and danger,
Sweet peace sits crowned with smiles,
And One born in a manger
Commands the beauteous files.
He is thy gracious friend
And (O my soul awake !)
Did in pure love descend
To die here for thy sake.
If thou canst get but thither
There growes the flowre of peace,

The rose that cannot wither,
Thy fortresse and thy ease.
Leave then thy foolish ranges,
For none can thee secure,
But One Who never changes,
Thy God, thy Life, thy Cure.

This is not the Paradise of the idler and the unaware, but the withdrawing of the soul to its Source, the "flight of the alone to the Alone."

After all, from what a torturing, disordered world—as such a man as he was would find it—did Vaughan withdraw.

Come then!

he cries to his "Retired Friend"—

and, while the slow icicle hangs
At the stiff thatch, and Winter's frosty pangs
Benumb the year, blithe—as of old—let us
Midst noise and war of peace and mirth discuss.
This portion thou wert born for; why should we
Vex at the time's ridiculous misery?
An age that thus hath fooled itself, and will
Spite of thy teeth and mine—persist so still.

Bravely outfaced, no doubt; but the sting of it all is clearly perceptible. The mental and moral state of the majority, as Vaughan saw them there and then, is vividly described by the method of contrast, when he writes his eulogy on his own friend who was "slain in

the late unhappy differences at Rowton Heath, near Chester, 1645" :—

> He weaved not self-ends and the public good
> Into one piece, nor with the people's blood
> Filled his own veins, in all the doubtful way
> Conscience and honour ruled him.

But the acuteness of his misery under the Puritan régime is to be found, not in his poems, either secular or religious, but in the prayers at the close of his *Mount of Olives*[1] : "Consider, O Lord, the tears of Thy spouse which are daily upon her cheeks, whose adversaries are grown mighty, and her enemies prosper. The ways of Sion do mourn, our beautiful gates are shut up ; and the Comforter that should relieve our souls is gone from us. Thy service and Thy Sabbaths, Thy own sacred Institutions and the pledges of Thy Love, are denied unto us. Thy ministers are trodden down, and the basest of Thy people are set up in Thy holy place. . . . Behold, the robbers are come into Thy sanctuary, and the persecutors are within Thy walls. We drink our own water for money, and our wood is sold unto us.[2] Our necks are under persecution ; we labour and have no rest. Yea, Thine own inheritance is given to strangers and Thine

[1] *The Mount of Olives, etc.* Edited by L. I. Guiney. (Published by Oxford University Press.)

[2] Lamentations v. 4.

own portion unto aliens."[1] In the next prayer, "in adversities and troubles occasioned by our enemies," he cries with a more poignantly personal note: "Thou seest, O God, how furious and implacable are mine enemies: they have not only robbed me of that portion and provision which Thou hast graciously given me, but they have also washed their hands in the blood of my friends, my dearest and nearest relatives.[2] I know, O my God, and I am daily taught by that Disciple whom Thou didst love, that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him. Keep me therefore, O my God, from the sight of blood, and suffer me not to stain my soul with the thought of recompense and vengeance, which is a branch of Thy great

---

[1] *The Mount of Olives*, p. 39.

[2] What this loss of friends and relations meant to Vaughan we can see in his moving poem :—

> They are all gone into the world of light!
> And I alone sit ling'ring here.

And in another, with its note of even more intimate sorrow :—

> Thou that knowst for whom I mourn
> And why these tears appear
>
> . . . . .
>
> O let me, like him, know my End
> And be as glad to find it;
> And whatsoe'er Thou shalt commend
> Still let Thy servant mind it.

prerogative, and belongs wholly unto Thee. Though they persecute me unto death, and pant after the very dust upon the heads of Thy poor, though they have taken the bread out of the children's mouth, and have made me a desolation—yet, Lord, give me Thy grace and such a measure of charity as may fully forgive them. Suffer me not to open my mouth in curses, but give me the spirit of my Saviour, Who reviled not again, but was dumb like a lamb before His shearers. O Lord! sanctify all these afflictions unto Thy servant, and let no man take away my crown." [1]

Bereaved of those whom he loved best, stripped of his means, Vaughan suffered further from religious deprivations; and, worst trial of all, to any who are trying, however imperfectly they may succeed, to live as Christians, from temptation to return evil for evil to those whom he sincerely believed to be not only his personal enemies, but profaners of the holiest mysteries and robbers of God. It is a hard trial for any, but incalculably more acute to those who have the mystic's sensitive apprehension as Vaughan had.

With everything, humanly speaking, against him, he deliberately withdrew from his untoward environment. More than that, he managed to reap from his sufferings material

[1] *The Mount of Olives*, pp. 40–1.

for his inner perfection, as he trod the mystic's solitary way : "We could not have lived in an age of more instruction, had we been left to our own choice. We have seen such vicissitudes and examples of human frailty as the former world, had they happened in those ages, would have judged prodigies. We have seen Princes brought to their graves by a new way, and the highest order of human honours trampled upon by the lowest. We have seen judgement beginning at God's Church, and (what hath been never heard of since it was redeemed and established by His blessed Son) we have seen His ministers cast out of the sanctuary, and barbarous persons, without light or perfection, usurping holy offices." [1]

Withdrawn from a world he could no longer share in wholeheartedly, nor by any effort whatsoever mend, Vaughan set about mending himself; first, as his prayer, already quoted, shows, from all bitterness and uncharity, since, like every mystic, he knew that love is the only possible atmosphere for the true servant of God, and next from his personal and natural imperfections. There is no evidence to show that his youth was in any notable way blameworthy; but, being a mystic, he had caught a fleeting vision of Absolute Goodness,

[1] *Man in Darkness*, op. cit., p. 47.

wherefore he abhorred himself, and set forth on the "asperous way" of Purgation.

If any reader knows very little of Vaughan, that little will probably include the often-quoted *Retreate*, which is among his most definite, if not the most definite, references to his effort after cleansing :—

> Happy those early dayes, when I
> Shined in my Angell-infancy !
>
> . . . . .
>
> When yet I had not walk't above
> A mile or two from my first Love,
>
> . . . . .
>
> Before I taught my tongue to wound
> My conscience with a sinfull sound,
> Or had the black art to dispence
> A sev'rall sinne to ev'ry sense.
>
> . . . . .
>
> O, how I long to travell back,
> And tread again that ancient track !
> That I might once more reach that plaine
> Where first I left my glorious traine ;
> From whence th' inlightened spirit sees
> That shady City of Palme trees.

It is the old familiar doctrine of Purgation before Illumination.

In his "Meditation at the setting of the Sun, or the Soul's elevation to the True Light," Vaughan preaches the same doctrine : "But the wicked neither know nor understand ; they walk in darkness, and from the inward darkness of their minds pass at last into the outward eternal darkness. . . . But on

those that walk with Thee an everlasting day shines. . . . O Light of Light, the brightness of Thy Father's glory, enlighten all inward obscurities in me, that after this life I may never be cast into the outer darkness." [1]

With a surer mystical touch he writes: "Enlighten my soul, sanctify my body, govern my affections and guide my thoughts, that in the fastest closure of my eyelids my spirit may see Thee. . . . Suffer me not, O my God, to forget Thee in the dark." [2]

In his poems his aspiration rises to greater heights, as he longs for the Illumination which is still withheld :—

> I cannot reach it; and my striving eye
> Dazzles at it, as at Eternity.
>
> . . . . .
>
> How do I study now, and scan
> Thee more than ere I studyed man,
> And only see through a long night
> Thy edges and Thy bordering light!
> O for Thy center and mid-day!
> For sure that is the *narrow way!*

Finally he reminds us of S. John of the Cross, when he exclaims :—

> There is in God some say,
> A deep but dazzling darkness; as men here—
> Say it is late and dusky, because they
> See not all clear.
> O for that night! when I in Him
> Might live invisible and dim!

---

[1] *Mount of Olives*, p. 15. [2] ibid., p. 17.

There are passages in *The Mount of Olives* which might have come from Rolle's pen; e.g. "When thou art to go from home, remember that thou art to come forth into the world, and to converse with an enemy; and what else is the world but a wildernesse, a darksome, intricate wood, full of ambushes and dangers; a forest where spiritual hunters, principalities and poweres spread their nets and compass it about?" And again: "If thou wilt have prayers to ascend up before God, thou must withdraw from all outward occupations to prepare for the inward and divine." That has the very note of Rolle's injunctions to Margaret.

Like all the mystics, Vaughan knew that God is Light and Heat; like the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* he is aware of something intervening between the soul and God; with S. Teresa he understands that no human effort can avail to bring or retain the vision of God; and he sums it all up in the poem to which he gave the curious title *Cock-crowing*:—

> O Thou immortall light and heat!
> Whose hand so shines through all this frame,
> That by the beauty of the seat,
> We plainly see who made the same.
> Seeing thy seed abides in me,
> Dwell Thou in it and I in Thee!
>
> . . . .

Only this veyle which Thou hast broke,
And must be broken yet in me,
This veyle, I say, is all the cloke,
And cloud which shadows Thee from me.
This veyle Thy full-ey'd love denies,
And onely gleams and fractions spies.

O take it off! make no delay;
And brush me with Thy light, that I
May shine unto a perfect day,
And warme me at Thy glorious Eye!
O take it off! or till it flee,
Though with no lilie, stay with me!

What we miss in Vaughan is not the hardness of the Way, for his path was persistently difficult and steep, nor the reality of Illumination, but that rapturous sense of achievement which crowns the work of Rolle and makes the *Angels' Song* bright with an unearthly joy. It is uphill all the way with Vaughan. His loyal heart and indestructible faith hold him up; but always close at hand and overshadowing memory of past transient joys are his sense of personal unworthiness, his realization of the wretchedly perilous condition of the world. Like Bacon, he might have said incessantly, "*Multum incola fuit anima mea.*"

Yet that very fact surely adds to his singular merit. A dispossessed man spiritually and in a worldly sense, without the Sacraments at times, unaided by counsel and direction, he was led into the inner court by direct divine help; however thick the "veyle" might seem

to him, the "spark at the apex of the soul" burned on, burned upward, flaming towards the great Fire of Love.

The eighteenth century and part of the nineteenth were dominated by such a strong current of prosaic materialism that the recollection of the fragrance of the seventeenth has faded from too many minds. The dire losses which followed on the great rent of the sixteenth century are still only too obvious and disastrous, but the seventeenth century knew the secret of their repair. Torn with that most bitter of all contention, strife between brothers, it still produced a literature so full of beautiful wisdom, of strong, sweet devotion, that no other century can quite match it. The English Church may fearlessly ask for some explanation of Henry Vaughan, Lancelot Andrewes, and many others whose names may be known or unknown, if she really did lose her Catholicity at the Reformation. Vaughan is less ordered, less systematic; but he is as truly mystical as any of our fourteenth-century mystics.-

In the enthusiasm naturally aroused by the discovery, some years ago, of Traherne's works a tendency arose to rate him above Vaughan. All such comparisons are futile and fruitless, because the two men were so utterly different in temperament, Vaughan being a devout soul, but irreparably saddened by the dark times, while

Traherne bubbled over with joy in the surrounding glory of the material universe. One comparison may perhaps be justly made, viz. between these two and Richard Crashaw, who has been so widely and unhesitatingly hailed as a mystic, that it is legitimate to seek for the grounds. Certainly his claims do not lie so near the surface as those of Vaughan and Traherne.

Probably most people rest his claim upon his two poems on S. Teresa, of which the less often-quoted *Hymn* contains more mysticism than the better-known *Flaming Heart.* But even here the impression given is much more that of a poet writing about a mystic than of a mystic pouring out his own actual experience.

For example, he describes S. Teresa's youthful attempt at martyrdom quite from a spectator's standpoint :—

> Sweet, not so fast ! lo, Thy fair Spouse
> Whom thou seek'st with so swift vows ;
> Calls thee back and bids thee come
> T' embrace a milder martyrdom.
> . . . . .
> Thou art Love's Victim ; and must die
> A death more mystical and high :
> Into Love's arms thou shalt let fall
> A still surviving funeral.
> His is the dart must make the death
> Whose stroke shall taste thy hallowed breath ;
> A dart thrice dipp'd in that rich flame
> Which writes thy Spouse's radiant name
> Upon the roof of Heaven.

Beautiful as these lines are, among the most perfect that he ever wrote, they could quite well be no more than the apostrophe of a man, acquainted with mystical literature, contemplating the life of a great mystic. With more semblance of personal experience he writes in his rendering of S. Thomas' Hymn in adoration of the Blessed Sacrament—

> Down, down, proud Sense! discourses die!
> Keep close my soul's inquiring eye!

But that is at least as much due to S. Thomas Aquinas as to Crashaw.

Two poems, one accompanying the gift of a Prayer Book to a young gentlewoman, and the other containing counsel for her, show him to have had real direct knowledge, mystical intuition. Who but one with some degree of such experience would write of—

> dear and divine annihilations;
> A thousand unknown rites
> Of joys, and rarified delights;
> An hundred thousand goods, glories and graces;
> And many a mystic thing,
> Which the divine embraces
> Of the dear Spouse of spirits, with them will bring.

The poem of *Counsel* strikes a still surer note of his own first-hand knowledge, as Crashaw strives to win this young soul to forsake the world and embrace religion :—

> Dear, Heaven designéd soul!
> Amongst the rest

Of suitors that besiege your maiden breast
Why may not I
My fortune try
And venture to speak one good word
Not for myself, alas! but for my dearer Lord?
. . . . .

Truth bids me say 'tis time you cease to trust
Your soul to any son of dust.
'Tis time you listen to a braver love,
Which from above
Calls you up higher
And bids you come
And choose your room
Among His own fair sons of fire;
. . . . .

Sweet, let me prophesy that at last 'twill prove
Your wary love
Lays up his purer and more precious vows,
And means them for a far more worthy Spouse
Than this World of lies can give you.
. . . . .

Let not my Lord, the mighty Lover
Of souls, disdain that I discover
The hidden art
Of His high stratagem to win your heart:
It was His heavenly art
Kindly to cross you
In your mistaken love;
That at the next remove
Thence, He might toss you
And strike your troubled heart
Home to Himself, to hide it in His breast
The bright ambrosial nest
Of Love, of life and everlasting rest.
Happy mistake![1]

[1] *The English Poems of Richard Crashaw*, vol. ii, pp. 103–5. Edited and published by J. R. Tutin.

No doubt, in challenging the suggestion that Francis Thompson was indebted to De Quincey's *Daughter of Lebanon* for the motive of *The Hound of Heaven*, Mr. Everard Meynell was right when he wrote: "the Victorian tassels of the earlier piece do not hide its lessons—'to suffer that God should give by seeming to refuse'—and pursuit is the theme common to both, and common to writers of most ages. De Quincey did no more than hand it on. From S. Augustine's, 'Thou wast driving me on with Thy good, so that I could not be at rest until Thou wast manifest to the eye of my soul'; to Meister Eckhart's 'He who will escape Him only runs to His bosom, for all corners are open to Him,' and so on, the idea is the same, though less elaborated and dramatic than in *The Hound*." [1]

Without wishing in any way to father *The Hound of Heaven* upon this beautiful poem of Crashaw, one can hardly help seeing striking likenesses both in matter and form.

Surely, without a doubt, the great, yet now so little-known, Donne, paradoxical and enigmatical, was more thoroughly mystical than Crashaw. Only a mystic, one who knew the need of purgation, one on whom the light had really shined, one who, however imperfect,

[1] Everard Meynell, *Life of Francis Thompson*, p. 165.

longed for union, could have written the *Hymn to God the Father* :—

I

Wilt Thou forgive that sin where I begun,
Which was my sin, though it were done before ?
Wilt Thou forgive that sin, through which I run,
And do run still, though still I do deplore ?
When Thou hast done, Thou hast not done,
For I have more.

II

Wilt Thou forgive that sin which I have won
Others to sin, and made my sin their door ?
Wilt Thou forgive that sin which I did shun
A year or two, but wallowed in a score ?
When Thou hast done, Thou hast not done,
For I have more.

III

I have a sin of fear that when I have spun
My last thread, I shall perish on the shore ;
But swear by Thyself, that at my death Thy Son
Shall shine as He shines now, and heretofore ;
And having done that, Thou hast done ;
I fear no more.[1]

As Donne was, through his mother, related to Sir Thomas More, it was natural that he should consider most carefully the relative claims of Rome and Canterbury ; his studies were prolonged, many years of secular life (perhaps less stained with gross sin than he himself in later life thought) elapsed before

[1] *The Poems* of Donne (The Muses Library), vol. i, p. 213.

he could bring himself to take Holy Orders, as James I so often and so strenuously urged him to do, and to serve the Anglican Church; a resolution which drew from Isaac Walton this eulogy in his *Life of Donne*: "Now the English Church had gained a second S. Austin; for I think none was so like him before his conversion, none so like S. Ambrose after it! and if his youth had the infirmities of the one, his age had the excellencies of the other; the learning and holiness of both."

From this time forward Donne's life was devout and devoted, and this deepened his inborn mysticism. The fine lines from *The Progress of the Soul* might be read as a kind of mystical epitome of his life:—

> I will through the wave and foam.
> And shall in sad lone ways, a lively sprite,
> Make my dark heavy poem light, and light.
> For though through many straits and lands I roam,
> I launch at Paradise, and I sail towards home.[1]

That Donne knew the possibility of a swifter, surer knowledge than that which proceeds from any process of reasoning is evident from the same poem:—

> To an unfetter'd soul's quick nimble haste
> Are falling stars and hearts' thoughts but slow-paced.
> Thinner than burnt air flies this soul.[2]

In the opening lines of his contemplation

[1] ibid., vol. ii, p. 151. [2] op. cit., vol. ii, p. 157.

on the death of Elizabeth Drury, after complaining that the flesh bars the spirit's passage,[1] he sweeps the material world aside as so much dross :—

> What fragmentary rubbish this world is
> Thou know'st, and that it is not worth a thought ;
> He honours it too much that thinks it nought.[2]

In the same poem, waiting—

> Till God's great Venite change the song,

in the language of a man who has really seen Reality he sets forth the only Way :—

> Thirst for that time, O my insatiate soul,
> And serve thy thirst with God's safe-sealing bowl ;
> Be thirsty still, and drink still till thou go
> To th' only health ; to be hydroptic so,
> Forget this rotten world ; and unto thee
> Let thine own times as an old story be.
>
> . . . . .
>
> The world is but a carcass ; thou art fed
> By it, but as a worm that carcass bred.
>
> . . . . .
>
> Look upward.

What those who follow this way can achieve he declares when eulogizing Mistress Drury ; he speaks of her as one—

> Whose twilights were more clear than our midday.

It may be a relief to some to turn from Vaughan, so often borne down by private

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[1] ibid., p. 126. [2] p. 129.

sorrows, due largely to public chaos and distress, and from Donne, whose dolour was partly temperamental, and not a little due to youthful indiscretions in the management of his career, to that singularly joyous mystic who stands apart in the seventeenth century, owing to his capacity for realizing with the Psalmist that—

In His Temple, everything saith Glory !

Thomas Traherne is known, if he can be said to be known at all, by two volumes—his *Centuries of Meditation* and his *Poems*. The manuscripts of these fell eventually into the hands of Mr. Bertram Dobell, having probably, for many generations, been in the possession of family connections of Traherne's brother Philip. In 1888 this family seem to have parted with some or all of their property. These particular manuscripts were apparently lost to sight and recollection for some years, until in 1897 Mr. W. T. Brooke picked them up for a few pence from a street bookstall. The great student and critic of the seventeenth century, Dr. Grosart, becoming aware of their existence, purchased them, and finally assigned them to the poet he loved so well, Henry Vaughan. When Dr. Grosart's Library was disposed of, Mr. Dobell bought these two, and later on he found and bought a third volume in the same handwriting, from a part of Dr. Grosart's Library sold to Sotheby. But Mr.

Dobell, surely with true critical insight, perceived that "whoever might have been their author, they were assuredly not written by the Silurist";[1] and having given several cogent reasons for his decision, he concludes thus: "With Traherne all nature is bathed in warmth and light: with Vaughan we feel sensible of a certain coolness of temperament, and are conscious that he rejoices rather in the twilight than in the radiance of noonday."[2]

But Traherne's characteristic is more than fervour or enthusiasm (both of which Mr. Dobell attributes to him), more than "warmth and light." Traherne "sees all things together," like Plato's Synoptikos, and seeing them, rejoices and triumphs in the sight. He holds out eager hands, like a child, to the glories of the visible world, but, unlike many children, he never tires of his Toys. An inextinguishable joyousness suffuses him, the world, all things; and his songs and his embroidered and illumined prose rise like a song of praise and thanksgiving to the Maker of it all.

Convinced that Vaughan never wrote any of it, prose or poem, Mr. Dobell patiently pursued literary clues, till he finally established the authorship of Traherne, who, born about

[1] *The Poetical Works of Thomas Traherne*, p. xc. Edited by Bertram Dobell.

[2] ibid., p. xci.

1636, and dying in 1674, proved to be not only the writer of the *Centuries* and the *Poems*, but of more or less well-known polemical works, *Roman Forgeries* and *Christian Ethics*.

Traherne's private life was quiet and ordinary in the extreme. He was the son of a Hereford shoemaker, and becoming a commoner of Brasenose, took his B.A. about 1661, and in due course his M.A. Having been presented to the Rectory of Credenill, now Credenhill, near Hereford, in 1669, he proceeded to take his B.D. Two years earlier he had been appointed Chaplain to Sir Orlando Bridgman, Lord Keeper of the Seals. When the Lord Keeper, five years later, was deprived of the seals, because he would not truckle to the Court Party, he retired, with his chaplain, to Teddington, and there, two years later, Traherne died.

If one thing be more certain than another, it is that mysticism is wholly independent of all material circumstances. "The Spirit bloweth where it listeth"—in court, or camp, on the high seas, in the remote depths of the country: "high and low, rich and poor, one with another," is the only true description of the whole company of the mystics.

These two manuscripts, so perilously hazarded on the waves of this troublesome world, garnered at last by a scholar, who, as he himself acknowledges, may not have fully

grasped their meaning, since his standpoint is so unlike the author's, contain some of the most individual thought ever set down in the English tongue, a proof, if need be, that "the Light which lighteth every man coming into the world" illuminates according to the response of the recipient soul, and not only in accordance with the environing world; for there was nothing particularly favourable to mysticism in Traherne's worldly circumstances.

Nevertheless, though one may call him unique, it is not to be forgotten that he was steeped in the thought of that other Thomas, called à Kempis, and that, odd as the fact may appear, he has struck one critic as comparable though superior to Father Augustine Baker: "The nearest parallel, in the English literature of the time, to the *Sancta Sophia* of Baker is the *Centuries of Meditation* of Thomas Traherne, yet Traherne above all things is an Anglican." [1] And again: "It is only necessary to compare it" (*Sancta Sophia*) "with the Meditations of Traherne to see how much the wider outlook of the English Churchman has affected the literary expression given to thoughts that were common to meditative souls." [2]

[1] *Cambridge History of English Literature*, vol. vii, ch. vi, p. 143, "Caroline Divines," by the Rev. W. H. Hutton, B.D. (now Dean of Winchester).

[2] ibid.

Perhaps Traherne's most striking and most lasting claim to unique distinction is the fact that to a profoundly spiritual apprehension of God he united an indestructible love for and sense of intimate union with the so-called material universe, as being God's handiwork: "We needed heaven and earth, our senses, such souls and bodies, with infinite riches in the Image of God to be enjoyed: which God of His mercy having freely prepared, they are most happy that so live in the enjoyment of those, as to need no accidental trivial things, no Splendours, Pomps, and Vanities. Socrates perhaps, being a heathen, knew not that all things proceeded from God to man, and by man returned to God: but we that know it must need all things as God doth, that we may receive them with joy, and live in His image."[1]

Traherne does not separate, he is no divider: the deep mysteries of religion and the beauties of the natural world make one great indivisible whole to this rapt seer, who perceived himself to be "the sole heir of the world."[2]

"Would men consider what God hath done they would be ravished in spirit with the glory of His doings. For heaven and earth are full of the majesty of His glory. And how happy would men be if they could see and enjoy it!

[1] *Centuries of Meditation*, i. 40. [2] ibid., i. xxix.

But above all these our Saviour's Cross is the throne of delights. That Centre of Eternity, that Tree of Life in the midst of the Paradise of God !

"There are we entertained with the wonder of all ages. *There we enter into the heart of the universe.*" [1]

In another wonderful phrase, in his long eulogy on the Cross : "That cross is a tree set on fire with invisible flame, that illuminateth all the world. The flame is Love, the Love in His bosom Who died on it," [2] Traherne reminds us of the "beautiful Tree of Glory" which Cynewulf described in *Elene* ; and so, one after another, the mystics prove their kinship through the ages, prove that saintship does not ever die among us, however inarticulate the ordinary Englishman may sometimes seem to be.

An American psychologist, Dr. Bucke, has presumed to fix the age when illumination, or as he prefers to call it "cosmic consciousness," occurs, viz. between the ages of thirty and forty. He adds, "Should we hear of a case of cosmic consciousness occurring at twenty, for instance, we should at first doubt the truth of the account, and if forced to believe it we should expect the man (if he lived) to prove himself in some way a spiritual giant." [3]

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[1] ibid., i. 55, 56. [2] ibid., i. 60.

[3] R. M. Bucke, *Cosmic Consciousness*, p. 62.

How then account for Traherne? who in the third "Century" of his *Meditations* writes so simply: "Those pure and virgin apprehensions I had from the womb, and that divine light wherewith I was born are the best unto this day, wherein I can see the Universe. By the gift of God they attended me into the world, and by His special favour I remember them till now." [1]

What these "apprehensions" were he indicates in a glorious passage, descriptive of the world as it appeared to him in childhood :—

"The corn was orient and immortal wheat, which never should be reaped, nor was ever sown. I thought it had stood from everlasting to everlasting. The dust and stones of the street were as precious as gold, the gates were at first the ends of the world. The green trees when I saw them first, through one of the gates, transported and ravished me. . . . Boys and girls tumbling in the street, and playing, were moving jewels. I knew not that they were born or should die. But all things abided eternally as they were in their proper places. Eternity was manifest in the Light of the Day. . . . The streets were, mine the temple was mine, the people were mine. . . .

"The skies were mine, and so were the sun

[1] *Centuries of Meditation*, iii. 1.

and moon and stars, and all the World was mine, and I the only spectator and enjoyer of it. I knew no churlish proprieties, nor bounds, nor divisions; but all proprieties and divisions were mine; all treasures and the possessors of them. So that with much ado I was corrupted, and made to learn the dirty devices of this world, which now I unlearn, and become, as it were, a little child again that I may enter into the kingdom of God." [1]

The same joy of infancy he expresses in his poem called *Wonder*, in stanzas one, two, and five.[2]

So in his infancy this true mystic grasped the truth which much later in life he wrote down in words: "All transient things are permanent in God." [3] He grasped too that other truth known to every mystic that the light of the day and the light of man's soul are alike set on fire by the Eternal Light: "Eternity was manifest in the light of the Day"; or as Thomas Browne wrote in a shining sentence of the *Hydriotaphia*, "Life is a pure flame, and we live by an invisible sun within us." [4]

Traherne describes the infrangible bond

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[1] ibid., iii. 3.

[2] *The Poetical Works of Thomas Traherne*, edited by Bertram Dobell, pp. 4 and 5.

[3] *Centuries of Meditation*, i. 62.

[4] *Urn Burial*, ch. v, § 13.

between God and man's soul by yet another image: "As iron at a distance is drawn by the loadstone, there being some invisible communications between them, so is there in us a world of love to somewhat, though we know not what in the world it should be. There are invisible ways of conveyance by which some great thing doth touch our souls, and by which we tend to it." [1]

Over and over his special mystical attitude recurs. It is not just the bare "flight of the alone to the Alone" on which he insists; but always he finds God because he (Traherne) is and must be a unit in the great God-created whole. There is no trace about him of being "saved alone." "You never enjoy the world," he cries, "till you . . . perceive yourself to be the sole heir of the whole world, and more than so because men are in it who are every one sole heir as well as you." [2]

What the world really is, and what our way of realizing it is, he describes thus: "The World is unknown till the Value and Glory of it is seen. . . . When you enter into it, it is an illimited field of Variety and Beauty, where you may lose yourself in the multitude of Wonders and Delights. But it is an happy loss to lose one's self in admiration of one's own Felicity, and to find God in exchange for oneself." [3]

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[1] *Centuries of Meditation*, i. 2. [2] i. 29. [3] i. 18.

Yet that is the "world as God has made it." Traherne is well aware that there is a misused, misdirected world of human manufacture, whose condition and effects are widely different.

The third "Century" is filled with recollections of the unmarred delight of his first entrance into the world, of his gradual disillusionment as he was forced "to learn the dirty devices of this world"; and then of his struggle to regain his early state of stainless joy. He has included in his prose *Centuries*, a poem in which he sets forth all this theme, concentrating it in two stanzas :—

> He in our childhood with us walks,
> And with our thoughts mysteriously He talks ;
> He often visiteth our minds,
> And cold acceptance in us ever finds :
> We send Him often grieved away,
> Who else would show us all His kingdom's joy.
>
> O Lord, I wonder at Thy love,
> Which did my infancy so early move ;
> And more at that which did forbear
> And move so long, though slighted many a year :
> But most of all, at last that Thou
> Thyself should'st me convert, I scarce know how.

The essence of Traherne's mysticism, his theory—if so stiff a word may be applied to so ethereal a thing—of it is to be found at its highest in his poems. Infancy, to him, seemed a most blessed state, because freed from all

impediment of the senses, senses not yet awakened to their work. He felt that his soul, in those early days, was face to face with the world's beauty, which to him was the very raiment of God. In the poem called *Dumbness* [1] he cries :—

> Sure Man was born to meditate on things,
> And to contemplate the eternal springs
> Of God and Nature, glory, bliss, and pleasure ;
> That life and love might be his heavenly treasure.

Immediately, he goes on to thank God that in infancy he was made speechless, deaf, unable to comprehend human language :—

> no work
> But one was found . . .
> D'ye ask me what ? . . .
> 'twas to inherit endless treasure,
> And to be filled with everlasting pleasure :
> To reign in silence and to sing alone,
> To see, love, covet, have, enjoy, and praise in one,
> To prize and to be ravish'd ; to be true,
> Sincere, and single in a blessed view
> Of all His gifts . . .
> the Earth did undertake
> The office of a priest, and I being dumb
> (Nothing besides was dumb) all things did come
> With voices and instructions.

His first state is one of entire purity and

[1] *Poetical Works of Thomas Traherne*, p. 34.

innocence, so he maintained, over and over again :—

> I felt no stain nor spot of sin,
> No darkness then did overshade
> But all within was pure and bright,
> No guilt did crush nor fear invade,
> But all my soul was full of light. [1]

His most beautiful account of the state of childhood is to be found in *The Approach*, part of which I have quoted ; it is the poem he printed in the *Centuries* :—

> He in our childhood with us walks,
> And with our thoughts mysteriously He talks ;
> He often visiteth our minds,
> But cold acceptance in us ever finds :
> We send Him often grieved away,
> Else He would show us all His kingdom's joy.
> . . . . .
> From nothing taken first I was ;
> What wondrous things His glory brought to pass !
> Now in this world I Him behold,
> And me enveloped in more than gold ;
> In deep abysses of delights,
> In present hidden precious benefits.[2]

Traherne traces here quite plainly the pathway along which vision came to him : he was one of those souls who find God through and in the world of created, material things ; the immanence leading on to the transcendence,

[1] ibid., p. 11. [2] pp. 31, 33.

for his way is not that of pantheism. God, to him, is in the world, but infinitely beyond and outside it too.

Nevertheless, brought though he was by this beautiful way, Traherne cannot keep in it, save by the hard way, common to the mystics, the way of purgation :—

> Spue out thy filth, thy flesh abjure ;
> Let not contingents thee defile.
> . . . . .
> Unfelt, unseen let those things be
> Which to thy spirit were unknown,
> When to thy blessed infancy
> The world, thyself, thy God was shown. [1]

But we are not to think of Traherne as one whose whole attention was centred on the external world. Even if he were more than usually "extroverted," to use Father Augustine Baker's word, surely he also had the "propensity." In his poem *Silence* he bids us withdraw into the cell of self-knowledge :—

> A quiet silent person may possess
> All that is great and high in Blessedness.
> The inward work is the supreme : for all
> The other were occasioned by the fall.
> A man that seemeth idle to the view
> Of others, may the greatest business do. [2]

There is the mystic's secret, the justification of the contemplative. Probably Traherne

[1] ibid., p. 19. [2] p. 38.

would agree that the original perception of God through the beauty of the outward world is a form of illumination. That must be helped before it comes, as a preparation for it and all along the way, by constant purgation, and by this quiet withdrawal into the inner cell of self-knowledge. Then the end of it all is, at last, the Vision of God :—

> Flight is but the preparative. The sight
> Is deep and infinite.
> Ah me! 'tis all the glory, love, light, space,
> Joy, beauty, and variety
> That doth adorn the Godhead's dwelling-place.
> . . . . .
> From one, to one, in one to see all things,
> To see the King of Kings
> But once in two; to see His endless treasures
> Made all mine own, myself the end
> Of all His labours! 'Tis the life of pleasures!
> To see myself His friend!
> Who all things finds conjoined to Him alone
> Sees and enjoys the Holy One.[1]

It is a vain hope to do anything like justice to so large a matter as English Mysticism in one small volume. But it is out of the question to omit Bunyan altogether, if it were only for the sake of one passage which shows a soul at the very polar opposite from Traherne, who owed so much to the friendliness of "Nature."

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[1] pp. 21, 23.

Oppressed from his boyhood by the sense of sin, and Bunyan tells us he was so when "but nine or ten years old," though withal he had "but few equals for cursing, swearing, lying, and blaspheming the Name of God,"[1] yet left to his own interpretation of the Bible, he could find no way of escape.

It is quite impossible, I think, to deny Bunyan a place among the mystics: flight and pursuit fill the earlier pages of *Grace Abounding*. He quotes, for example, the passage from Job, "Then, I said unto God, Depart from me, for I desire not the knowledge of Thy ways,"[2] and he quotes it as representing accurately, at one period, his own condition of mind. Yet, two paragraphs further on, he declares: "But God did not utterly leave me, but followed me still, not now with Convictions, but Judgements, yet such as were mixed with Mercy."

Flight and pursuit were still the story of his spiritual life long after he had come to man's estate, and carried all the responsibilities of married life on his shoulders. Having heard a sermon condemning Sunday games, long a special temptation to him, Bunyan rebelled: "I shook the Sermon out of my Mind, and to my old Custom of Sports and Games I returned with great Delight.

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[1] *Grace Abounding*, § 4. [2] ibid., § 10.

"But the same day, as I was in the midst of a game of Cat, and having struck it one blow from the Hole, just as I was about to strike it the second time, a Voice did suddenly dart from Heaven into my Soul, *Wilt thou leave thy sins and go to Heaven or have thy sins and go to Hell?* At this I was put to an exceeding Maze. Wherefore, leaving my Cat upon the ground, I looked up to Heaven, and was as if I had with the Eyes of my Understanding seen the Lord Jesus looking down upon me." [1]

Who can pretend that this experience is outside the realm of mysticism? Who can wonder that mystical experience should be bestowed on a man who, having read "some *Ranters' Books* that were put forth by some of our *Countrymen*," and found himself after reading them "not able to make a Judgement about them," cries out in his bewildered misery, "*O Lord, I am a fool, and not able to know the Truth from Error; Lord, leave me not to mine own Blindness, either to approve of or condemn this Doctrine. If it be of God, let me not despise it; if it be of the Devil, let me not embrace it. Lord, I lay my Soul, in this matter, only at Thy foot; let me not be deceived, I humbly beseech Thee.*" [2]

The particular passage, relating how it seemed to him that, owing to his state of

[1] ibid., § 22. [2] ibid., § 44.

sin, all nature turned from him, forming as it does a strange contrast to Traherne's approach through nature, is a long one. But as *Grace Abounding*, albeit it is one of the great "Confessions" of the world, has perhaps fewer readers now even than *The Pilgrim's Progress* I will quote it here :—

"I saw, indeed, that sin might drive the soul beyond Christ, even the sin which is unpardonable; but woe to him that was so driven, for the Word would shut him out.

"Thus was I always sinking, whatever I did think or do. So one day I walked to a neighbouring Town, and sat down upon a Settle in the Street, and fell into a very deep pause about the most fearful state my sin had brought me to; and after long musing, I lifted up my head, but methought I saw as if the Sun that shineth in the Heavens did grudge to give light, and as if the very Stones in the Street, and Tiles upon the Houses, did bend themselves against me; methought that they all combined together to banish me out of the World. I was abhorred of them, and unfit to dwell among them, or be partaker of their benefits, because I had sinned against the Saviour. O how happy, now, was every creature over I was! For they stood fast and kept their station, but I was gone and lost.

"Then breaking out in the bitterness of my soul, I said to myself, with a grievous sigh,

How can God comfort such a wretch as I? I had no sooner said it but this returned upon me, as an echo doth answer a voice, '*This sin is not unto death.*' At which I was as if I had been raised out of a Grave, and cried out again, *Lord, how couldest Thou find out such a word as this?* For I was filled with admiration at the fitness, and, also, at the unexpectedness of the sentence. The fitness of the Word, the rightness of the timing of it, the power and sweetness, and light and glory that came with it, also, were marvellous to me to find. I was now, for the time, out of doubt as to that about which I so much was in doubt before. My fears before *were*, that my sin was not pardonable, and so that I had no right to pray, to repent, etc., or that if I did, it would be of no advantage or profit to me. But now, thought I, if *this* sin is not unto death, then it is pardonable; therefore, from this, I have encouragement to come to God, by Christ, for mercy; to consider the promise of forgiveness as that which stands with open arms to receive me, as well as others. This, therefore, was a great easement to my mind; to wit, that my sin was pardonable, that it was not the sin unto death. None but those that know what my trouble, by their own experience, was, can tell what relief came to my Soul by this consideration. It was a release to me from my former bonds, and a shelter from

my former storm. I seemed now to stand upon the same ground with other sinners, and to have as good a right to the Word and Prayer as any of them." [1]

As we read this, however strange the language may seem to some of us, the natural burning words of his humble prayer steal back to us : " *Lord, I lay my soul, in this matter, only at Thy foot : let me not be deceived, I humbly beseech Thee.*" The faith of the most stalwart saint must falter were such total, confident self-surrender unavailing, if such a compelling petition could really die away unheard, unanswered on the empty air. Illumination, vision, must eventually come to crown with victory's reward such complete yielding of the whole man.

Bunyan did not walk along the path of the Church's appointed means ; but it is hard to believe that the great visionaries—S. Ignatius, S. Teresa, Richard Rolle—have not found in him a kindred soul.

The seventeenth century, rich as it already is, is still an age which seems destined to reveal perpetually fresh treasures. Following close on the finding of Thomas Traherne's lost writings came the discovery of the buried work of a priest, Richard White, for many years confessor of a monastery at Louvain.

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[1] *Grace Abounding*, §§ 186–8.

The manuscript, *Celestial Fire*,[1] was in the possession of a member of the Ferrar family, of Little Gidding ; and having been found recently, was after much labour traced to Father White. Among the mystics he is slightly singular, because his approach is specially directed to our Lord the Holy Ghost—a direction far rarer than it should be among all men in all times.

The book, so long hidden, forgotten, addressed to his "dearest friends"—probably a community of nuns at Newton Abbot—as a legacy, is a series of meditations on the sequence—

> Veni, Sancte Spiritus,
> Et emitte Cœlitus
> Lucis tuæ radium

of the Mass of Pentecost.

Taking the Golden Sequence, line by line, this priest spun round it the confession of his sense of his own sin and worthlessness, and his lowly penitence there for, using it as a vehicle for his aspirations, his fiery love, his intense longing for illumination of spirit, and for final union with God.

It is one of those perfect books of devotion which suffer irreparably when they are cut into

[1] Edited in 1913 by E. M. Green, with an Introduction by Father Congreve. (Published by Longmans.)

fragments for the purposes of quotation ; still, perhaps these two passages may be given here just to show what manner of man he was, how he strove to purge himself, that his tiny spark might at last be drawn up to the consuming Flame which is God ; just to win, if possible, fresh readers for a book which is not surpassed in intensity of devotion by any other, even of its own significant and perhaps unparalleled era : "*In Labore requies*. . . . I am poor and have been toiled with labours from my youth, with labours not of virtue but iniquity, in which I have wasted the morning of my life, the best and greatest portion of my days ; wherewith I have tired the faculties of soul and body and almost consumed myself. . . .

"I knew my labours, and, through a vicious disposition which possessed me, loved them ; but Thee I neither loved nor knew, Who art to all who seek Thee, *in labore requies*.

"But now, since Thou, Who art the finger of God's right hand, hath pleased to touch my heart and impart one glimpse of light unto my soul, I begin to see the lewdness of my youth and blindness of my former days : fain would I now return and leave the servitude I have been in, but my imperious masters hinder me ; my former evils fasten me to the earth ; ill customs turned into necessity, they have chained me to my thraldom. . . . Come, let me

repose in Thee, Who only art the rest in labour." [1]

Since the whole book is a series of meditations on this Sequence, the course of Father White's thought is necessarily determined by the order of the several petitions ; therefore his petition for union comes first : "*Veni, Sancte Spiritus.* Come, Holy Spirit, come all in fire, that Thou mayst inflame me, that Thou mayst consume me wholly, for Thou art a consuming fire. Fire converts into itself whatever approaches it : Thou art that fire which our Saviour came to cast into this world : come, therefore, and convert me into Thyself, that I may be all on fire, all a flame of Divine Love, and that no thought may live within my heart but of the love of God, love of my neighbour : that all I tend to may be love, and what concerns not love I may be a stranger to." [2]

For different reasons, but equally justly, France and England alike regard the seventeenth century as a period in their literature of rare fruitfulness and beauty. As we linger at the century's close in our own country, and turn our memory backwards over the mystical writings which are oases of peace and inexpressible joy in a desert of strife and loss, some of us, possibly, may pick out Gertrude More as

[1] *Celestial Fire*, ch. ix. [2] ibid., ch. i.

being, so far as we fallible mortals can dare to judge, the most exquisite spirit of all that small illuminated band.

While Spain, and with Spain the rest of the world, has preserved the details and cherished the memory of S. Teresa's life, Gertrude More has fallen out of the recollection of all but a few. It is worse than silly to attempt to put saints in lists of merit. Yet, without dreaming of such a folly, one may perhaps legitimately suggest that this member of the More family, a family remarkable at once for sanctity, brains, and wit, is a most wonderful soul even in the roll of the saints. Sometimes we English are so extravagantly wasteful of treasure. Here, in this case, we executed one and forgot the other, and did little to help the collateral Donne ; and the majority still go on their unheeding way, ready as ever to kill the prophets and stone them that are sent unto them.

No one can wish less than I to belittle that most dear and great saint, Teresa de Jesus ; nevertheless there are qualities in Dame Gertrude which, I think, make her worthy of a place in our affections at S. Teresa's side. The latter's well-known motto was, *Let me suffer or die*. Really, sincerely said, that is very, very hard, and beyond the power of most of us. To such, or to some of them, Dame Gertrude's "Let me either love or not

live" may bring a way of escape: not that it is easy really and sincerely to love; a fact which she herself admits when, two pages later, she exclaims, "I am not worthy to love."

In a world where difficulties crowd in on us, and vary according to our several tempers, a few may be able to say with S. Teresa, *Let me suffer or die*; a few more, perhaps, with Dame Gertrude, *Let me either love or not live*; while the rest of us who care about holy things will be left wishing that we could say either quite without reservation.

But Dame Gertrude's striking characteristic is her comprehensive and very definite view of "duty," whether it be suffering or loving or anything else. No doubt if S. Teresa could have read these *Writings* of Dame Gertrude she would not find them irreconcilable with her own views; but Dame Gertrude somehow puts the case in a fashion which the average mortal can better grasp, her English quality of practicalness helping her just here.

In the eighth and ninth of her *Confessiones Amantis* she conveys with a simplicity which perhaps no other mystic has surpassed the innermost essence of holy service, of perfect, absolute surrender: "Thou wilt provide crosses, such and so many as will be sufficient to make us become what Thou wouldst have us to be; and in those of Thy sending, there is no danger, if we will endeavour to be

faithful to Thee, and in them call often upon Thee. But when we unduly place such perfection in suffering that we think we do nothing unless we be suffering, and are, as it were, loath to lose time (as we imagine) by being without occasion of suffering, we oftentimes fail in those very crosses which, in such a humour, we lay upon ourselves, or thrust ourselves into, without Thy leave, and so disable ourselves from undergoing and suffering those which, then or afterwards, are thought by Thee to be fitter for us. . . . If we will, therefore, in all live secure, let us desire nothing—no, not even to have matter of suffering, save so far as it shall be His pleasure. For certainly, to suffer for Him is so great an honour that one may justly esteem oneself unworthy thereof; and yet it is a thing so necessary to advance us in the way of love that we need not doubt but that God will provide it when He sees fit; and when He doth send it, come which way it will, it will be no impediment to a faithful soul. But the only way to live secure in this, as well as in all other things, is to be as a little child by humble resignation, and let God do with us in all what He will." [1]

In the ninth Confession she pursues this subject: "Worthily may obedience be pre-

[1] *Writings* of Dame Gertrude More, p. 40.

ferred before sacrifice,[1] for it is that which governeth Heaven and Earth, and which only deserveth reward in Thy sight. . . . This obedience to Thee maketh the Angels as well content with their degree of glory as to be of the Seraphim who are yet in a far higher degree of glory in Thy kingdom. This maketh Thy saints content with theirs. This maketh souls on earth who aspire to Thee with all their hearts to limit their desires to Thy goodwill and pleasure. . . . This maketh them desire neither disgrace nor glory, neither pain nor health, neither crosses nor comforts."[2] Once more, "never can we prosper in a spiritual life unless we hearken to Thee, and observe even in the least things what Thou wouldest have us to do, and go that way which Thou wouldest have us in all things whatsoever."[3]

Surely any one who can carry out these precepts, not only when all things are going easily and pleasantly, but when pain and sorrow are overwhelming and there apparently opens no way of escape, and also when life is exorbitantly drab and monotonous, has found the one Way?

This teaching has, perhaps, an added weight when we remember that it comes to us from

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[1] 1 Sam. (Vulgate, 1 Kings) xv. 22 : *Melior est enim obedientia quam victimae, et auscultare magis quam offerre adipem arietum.*

[2] *Writings*, pp. 42–3. [3] ibid.

a woman with mental gifts above the ordinary, from a woman who loved all the natural good things of life, whose senses were unusually keen and alert, whose attention "extroverted," turned outward, was always at grips with her "propensity," which led inwards, and up to God.

Dame Gertrude More was no gentle, "woolly," placid, easily-led character; she was all alive everywhere, and always; yet this high, exacting doctrine came to be the secret of her life.

With a delightful image of God's varying method with different souls we will leave her, and the picturesque, fragrant and devout seventeenth century: "Thou flyest up with them, who by an ardent love have surmounted all created things, and are firmly united to Thee in spirit. And Thou also lendest Thy sweet Hand to Thy little and imperfect ones, who are of a good will, to help them out of the mire and dirt of passions and inordinate affections." [1]

[1] ibid., p. 44.

CHAPTER VI

Nature Mystics

"GUTHLAC WAS GOOD; IN HIS HEART HE BORE A HEAVENLY HOPE AND SOUGHT THE HEALING OF ETERNAL LIFE."[1]

THERE are writers who definitely rule out the possibility of nature mysticism; but the Catholic Church has never formally done so. By nature mysticism is not meant pantheism nor any approach to it; nor what an American writer has called "cosmic consciousness."[2] The phrase is used in this book for that direct approach of the human soul to God which results from the conviction that the beauty of this world is the work of God still, as it was when He beheld it first and pronounced it "very good"; and from the conviction—this is the justification for calling it mysticism—that that work is for ever a part of, an emanation from, the Worker. It is a true, genuine form of mysticism, one likely to be found among Englishmen with their indigenous love for nature.

It is surely an idle waste of time to contend

[1] *Guthlac*, Part A, ch. iii, attributed to Cynewulf.

[2] See above, p. 251.

over the relative values of a Rolle's or a Wordsworth's intuition of the Divine Being. God, after all, knows the nature and capacity of these English whom He made; and if their particular genius sometimes responds to the Divine Worker more quickly by way of His work spread out in all its glory and beauty than by way of their own toil in purgation and mortification—in other words if He prepares each one for illumination and union by the way most suitable to each—why should one way be accepted as orthodox and the other ruled out as sentimental emotion? It is an old and very common human temptation to be wiser than God.

I have put at the head of this chapter a quotation with its artless but far-reaching opening, "Guthlac was good," because I venture to think that it may stand for that intrinsically wholesome, direct, single-minded attitude which is not only typical of the genuine Englishman, but is explanatory of his frequent response to nature as a direct adumbration of the Real Presence, so barely veiled, so close to the beating heart and longing soul of the God-convinced mortal. It may be very necessary to acquaint one's self with the whole poem to which Guthlac's name serves as a title before one realizes the connotation here of that one word "good." Any one who will read the poem must be struck by

his love of nature. Like an earlier S. Francis, he found friends in the creatures, and in the natural forces of the world: "The tribe of forest birds with their notes proclaimed the coming of the holy man unto his home again; oft he held out food to them, and they were wont to fly in hunger round about his hand, in great desire rejoicing in his succour. . . . Fair was the pleasant plain, and his new dwelling; winsome the call of birds. The earth put forth her blossoms, cuckoos proclaimed the year. And Guthlac, that blessed steadfast man, might have joy of his abode; in God's keeping lay the meadow green." [1]

Later, when pain and disease seized him, and death hovered near, he still was the consoler of man and creature: "Ever they found Guthlac ready and wise of thought. And he abode steadfast though the throng of fiends menaced him with pain of body. Whiles all the kind of birds, oppressed with hunger, flew unto his hands where they found sure relief, extolling him with ardent voices. Whiles human heralds came to him in lowliness, and there, after their journey, found help and comfort of heart at the hand of that holy servant in that blissful plain. No one there was indeed who went away cast down in heart, wretched or hopeless. But the holy

[1] *The Poems of Cynewulf*, p. 285. Translated by C. W. Kennedy, Ph.D. (Published by Routledge.)

man by his noble power healed every mortal, every man racked with pain or sick at heart. He healed both soul and body as long as the Warden of life, Eternal and Almighty, would grant him that he might enjoy bliss and life in the world." [1]

The secret of this oneness of Guthlac with the whole creation — because behind the visible work he had caught a vision of the Divine Worker—Cynewulf, if he wrote it, had revealed at the poem's outset.

Guthlac, alone, surrounded by a host of menacing enemies, proclaims his secret: "As I stand here before you, I am not so devoid of help, lacking a host of men; but for me abideth and increaseth a greater portion in the mystic secrets of the spirit, which doth uphold me with its succour. For myself alone, full easily shall I rear a house and place of refuge: for me is counsel present in the heavens. . . . At God's hand will I seek for peace, nor shall my spirit suffer evil among you." [2]

The feature which preserves this nature mysticism from drifting into mere pantheism is the knowledge that the "universe of existence," man, the creatures, trees and plants, sea and sky, everything, are, in their degree, the work of God; and that it is in this great fellowship that man comes to God.

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[1] ibid., p. 290. [2] p. 270.

The authorship of the poem has been disputed, but whether Cynewulf wrote it or some other, the question is not vital to this present study. It suffices for the propositions advanced here, that all the poems should come from some Early English writer.

Whoever wrote *Guthlac*, *The Christ* is generally admitted to be Cynewulf's; it is one of the four poems containing, by runes, his signature; and pre-eminently, I think uniquely, handled in the marvellous description of Doomsday at the close of the poem, do we find this sense of the oneness of creation, the fact that man is a part but not the whole of the divine work.

In the course of this picture of the Last Day, a passage which would delight the author of *The Ode to the Setting Sun*, occurs: "Yet will He sternly take recompense again for all, when the red cross shineth over all the heavens in the place of the sun." This image draws Cynewulf on to a description of the Crucifixion; and in the course of it some vivid touches seem to add something of startling freshness to the story of Calvary, whose horror one not seldom fears has been blunted to some by perpetual repetition. Cynewulf tells us that the "hell-destined men" who had committed the crime "saw the dumb creation, the radiant-green earth and upper sky, with trembling feel its Saviour's agonies;

and though they lived not, woefully they wailed when men of evil seized upon their Maker with evil hands."

Then follows the Gospel statement, "The sun was darkened"; to which Cynewulf adds the tinge of personality, "veiled in sorrow"; and he continues, still blending the familiar sacred story with poetic imagery, "Many walls and rocks throughout the world were burst asunder; also the earth, shaken with terror, trembled in tumult. The broad sea made known the strength of its might, and from its bonds in wrath broke forth into the lap of earth; and from their shining stations the stars forsook their splendour sweet. In that same hour, heaven clearly knew Who decked it brightly with its starry gems. . . . And many a tree, no little number, revealed Who shaped them with their blossoms, when mighty God mounted on one of them, whereon He knew affliction for the need of human kind, a baleful death to succour men. Then many a tree wept bloody tears under its bark, ruddy, abundant tears: the sap was turned to blood." [1]

A similar picture of creation suffering with our Lord is to be found in the *Dream of the Rood*: "Darkness had compassed about with clouds the body of the wielding God, that

[1] ibid., pp. 187 et seq.

lustrous radiance. Wan under heaven shadows went forth. And all creation wept, wailing the slaughter of its King. Christ was on the cross."

That Cynewulf was fully conscious of his point of view, that it was quite deliberate and intentional, however unusual, is proved by the next sentence, which sums it all up in a few words : " Nor may the dwellers of the world unriddle that, by craft of wisdom, how many lifeless things that might not feel still knew the Passion of our Lord." [1]

Cynewulf must have attributed a very limited inanimacy, non-sentience, to what, in deference to ordinary opinion, he gives the accepted name—" lifeless things."

It is quite true, as Professor Cook in his book *The Christ of Cynewulf* says, that the idea of the inanimate creation being aware of Christ's Passion may be found in S. Leo the Great's Sermon on the Passion, and that it occurs again in a homily of S. Gregory the Great. But it is not a common thought in English literature. Moreover, in all Cynewulf's references to nature there is a peculiar tenderness, a something individual which is absent from these discourses ; and the assertion that human beings cannot discern how lifeless things knew of the Passion appears

[1] ibid., p. 188.

to be his own; it does not, at any rate, occur in S. Leo or S. Gregory.

To Cynewulf, as to the Hebrew Psalmist, "In His temple everything saith Glory!" Everything: there is shewn the mystical sense which penetrates the veil and apprehends reality.

Of all our Early English poets, he, if the writings attributed to him be really his, is nearest to that poetry of natural beauty, which never dies out in our literature as the generations pass away. There is, I think, only one possible exception—the author of *The Phoenix*, if Cynewulf did not write it. Not Traherne himself has drawn a more gladsome, blessed picture of natural beauty and peace and joy than the description of the land in general, and of the wood in particular, where the immortal Phoenix dwelt. The passage is known to every English scholar; but it will bear quotation again: "That is a winsome plain, the woods are green, far-stretching 'neath the sky. Nor there may any rain or snow, nor breath of frost nor blast of fire, nor storm of hail nor fall of rime, nor heat of sun, nor everlasting cold, nor warm weather, nor winter shower work harm a whit, but the plain endureth blessed and wholesome. . . . There stand no hills, nor mountains steep, nor strong cliffs rise high as here with us, nor dales, nor glens, nor mountain gorges, caves nor crags.

No whit of roughness bideth there, but the pleasant field, blossoming with delights, bringeth forth beneath the clouds. . . .

"Serene is that pleasant plain; its sunny grove gleameth, winsome its woodland glades. Its increase faileth not, its pleasant fruit; but ever the trees stand green as God gave bidding. In winter and in summer are the groves likewise hung with fruit; never a leaf fadeth in the air. . . . In that land, there is no hated foe, neither weeping nor vengeance, nor any sign of sorrow, nor age nor misery, nor narrow death, failing of life nor coming of the foe, nor sin nor strife, nor tribulation, paupers' toil nor want of wealth, sorrow nor sleep nor bed of pain, nor wintry gusts, nor tossing tempests raging beneath the sky, neither the hard frost with chill icicles troubleth any. There no hail nor rime fall upon the earth, nor windy cloud; there water falleth not, stirred in air. But flowing streams, wondrous, curious wells flow forth, watering the earth with pleasant streams. From the wood's middle, from the turf of earth, each month a winsome water breaketh, cold as the sea, faring abundantly through all the grove. It is the bidding of the Lord that twelve times the joy of water floods shall overflow the glorious land. The groves are hung with bloom and beauteous increase; the holy treasures of the wood wane not beneath the heaven. The

fallow blossoms, the beauty of the forest trees fall not upon the ground; but on the trees the boughs are ever wondrous laden, the fruit new in every season. In the grassy plain, the forests fair stand green, joyously garnished by the might of Holy God. Nor is the wood broken in aspect, but there a holy perfume dwelleth in that winsome land. Never shall that know change for ever, until He Who shaped it in the beginning shall bring His ancient work of wisdom unto its end." [1]

Perhaps it is unnecessary to say—since no language or dialect can really be translated into another—that much of the charm and beauty of the original has unavoidably evaporated during the passage into modern English.

Nature, though it is a term often used ambiguously, and sometimes narrowly, must of course include humanity as part of the created universe. Therefore nature mystics find God not only in the physical, material universe, but in human beings. It is not giving him more than his due, I think, to take William Law as a signal example of a mystic who worked his way to God through human nature. After all, that was the likeliest path for a man of the eighteenth century, so absorbed in the study of man and his attributes and powers.

[1] *The Poems of Cynewulf*, pp. 312 et seq. Translated by C. W. Kennedy.

It may perhaps be well to forestall a criticism that he cannot be regarded as a typically English mystic, since his loan from Jacob Boehme is both extensive and obvious. There is a shred of truth in the objection ; but on that line of thought we might rule out Vaughan on account of his Welsh descent, and perhaps find something disqualifying in every one mentioned in this book, since, whatever the English race may or may not be, it is mixed.

Though probably every one thinks he understands the meaning of coming to God through Nature, it may be desirable, before dealing with Law, to indicate some of the difficulties of the Way, when it lies among problems and phenomena of human nature.

Cardinal Newman, in a letter to Dr. Meynell, Professor of Philosophy at Oscott, written in January, 1860, said that if he wrote a new book, "its object would be to show that a given individual, high or low, has as much right (has as real rational grounds) to be certain, as a learned theologian who knows the scientific evidence."

This is not just tantamount to saying, what most of us must have observed, that as a matter of fact the "simply good" have, apart from theological training and special natural ability, that conviction, that kind of sure knowledge, which is sometimes called *foi du charbonnier*. Newman's statement is more important and

far-reaching: his phrase is that such a one "has as real rational grounds" as another knowing the evidence.

It is difficult, in the light of his *Grammar of Assent* and the *University Sermons*, not to wonder if he would not have expressed his precise meaning better if he had said that such a person's certainty is as really justifiable as the scientific person's, which is based on evidence. Though it is temerarious in the extreme to challenge the choice of words of such a master of style, the introduction of the word rational seems to confuse the problem in its very centre.

Mr. Wilfrid Ward, commenting on this letter, says: "Let it be remembered that the ordinary reply in the current school treatises to the question, 'How can the uneducated man have sufficient reason for belief in Christianity?' was that such a one has reasons sufficient to satisfy his own limited intellect. This clearly left a difficulty unsolved. For a fallacious argument might satisfy an uncritical and uneducated mind. In the *University Sermon* on "Wisdom as contrasted with Faith and Bigotry," Newman had met the difficulty by the suggestion that the faith of the simple involved a semi-conscious share in the wisdom of the Church as a whole." [1]

[1] Wilfrid Ward, *Life of John Henry, Cardinal Newman*, vol. ii, p. 244.

In the *Grammar of Assent* Newman went a step further and spoke of those who have "a heart and eye for truth"; and in that great, and greatly neglected, book he developed his theory of the "illative sense," of which more must be said in the last chapter of this book.

The question which underlay his desire to write that particular book is really this: Can any person know the truths of religion without possessing considerable ability, and without having that ability trained, and finally, without having used such trained ability, to carry out an exhaustive inquiry into fundamental religious questions? If the answer is to be a negative, the question must arise, Who, then, can be saved? As a matter of fact, both common sense and experience show that the answer must be Yes. But when the next question, *How* can he have this knowledge? is put, neither the answer which Mr. Ward quotes from current school treatises, nor Newman's suggestion about "a semi-conscious share in the wisdom of the Church as a whole," seems to cover the ground.

Can any suggestion cover it, save one which allows for the possibilities of mysticism?

In his *Mystical Element of Religion* Baron von Hügel made a statement which has often been quoted in theological articles about the *three elements* in religion. He writes: "Even the most elementary acquisition, indeed the very

possibility of any and all certitude of knowledge, is dependent for us upon the due collaboration of the three elements or forces of our nature, the sensational, the rational, the ethico-mystical." [1]

These three result outwardly in three several aspects of religion; first, the "External, Authoritative, Traditional, Institutional side"; [2] second, the state when "Religion becomes Thought, System or Philosophy"; [3] and thirdly, "the Experimental and Mystical." [4]

Baron von Hügel argues that, in greater or less degree, these three religious conditions, corresponding to three "natural" fundamental human states, are essential and complementary: "Now these three sides of the human character and corresponding three elements of Religion are never any one of them without a trace or rudiment of the other two; and this joint presence of three such disparate elements ever involves tension, of a fruitful or dangerous kind." [5] If he be right in this analysis, is it not the fact that the mystical element can and probably does account for the unshakable convictions of the unlearned? Baron von Hügel speaks of an *element* of mysticism, and expects it to be capable of detection in us all. It may vary infinitely in different individuals,

[1] Friedrich von Hügel, *The Mystical Element of Religion*, vol. i, pp. 55–6.

[2] ibid., vol. i, p. 53. [3] ibid. [4] p. 55. [5] p. 53.

from that great degree which makes it the dominant factor in a Rolle or a Ruysbroeck or a S. Teresa, to that touch of it which enables the illiterate to be "sure" of that which they could not know were they obliged to find and sift the evidence?

At the same time his warning about the danger of these coincident but disparate elements should not be forgotten. As heresies and schisms arise from exaggeration of a single truth, so that temper of exaggeration may spring from too great and exclusive reliance on one of these three elements, an exaggerated rationalism an over-stiff traditionalism or a swollen and misused mysticism.

These suggestions of Newman and Baron von Hügel may be useful in throwing some light on Law, for he is, *par excellence*, the English mystic who dwells on that approach to God which is possible, not through the material universe, but by reason of man's constitution, of the infrangible link divinely forged which holds him to God. Law's works, apart from the *Serious Call*, which is far more occupied with daily conduct than with mysticism, are not easy to obtain. But a very useful volume of extracts from his writings, specially his mystical writings, was published in 1908.[1]

[1] *Liberal and Mystical Writings of William Law*, edited by William Scott Palmer. (Published by Longmans & Co.)

A few passages from the first essay in this book, *The Spirit of Prayer*, will show the core and essence of Law's mysticism.

"God, the only good of all intelligent natures, is not an absent or distant God, but is more present in us and to our souls than our own bodies; and we are strangers to Heaven, and without God in the world, for this only reason—because we are void of the Spirit of Prayer, which alone can and never fails to unite us with the one only good, and to open Heaven and the Kingdom of God within us."[1]

That is Law's plea, that the kingdom of God is within us. Not for him is the veil of nature's beauty, which so barely, so transparently to the illumined, covers the Divinity within, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not"; he, so he urges again and again, need not go out of himself at the start. With him the Divine is immanent, not in the world of nature but in the heart of man: "For the sun meets not the springing bud that stretches towards him with half that certainty as God, the Source of all good, communicates Himself to the soul that longs to partake of Him."[2]

What, then, is required of man? Law's answer is short and clear: "Awake then thou

[1] ibid., p. 11. [2] ibid.

that sleepest, and Christ, Who from all Eternity hath been espoused to thy soul, shall give thee Light. Begin to search and dig in thine own field for this Pearl of Eternity, that lieth hidden in it ; it cannot cost thee too much, nor canst thou buy it too dear, for it is all." [1]

He answers the question put by Newman as appositely as if the two men had actually met and discussed it : "The Word, which is the Wisdom of God, is in thy heart. . . . It is there as a speaking Word of God in thy soul ; and as soon as thou art ready to hear, this eternal, speaking Word will speak Wisdom and Love. . . . Hence also it is that in the Christian Church there have been in all ages the most illiterate, both men and women, who have attained to a deep understanding of the wisdom and love of God in Christ Jesus. And what wonder ? Sure it is not art or science, or skill in grammar or logic, but the opening of the divine Life in the soul, that can give true understanding of the things of God." [2]

It must be obvious that so great a gift as this, and one so intimately individual and universal too, since Law claims that it is given to every man, must have its constant and tremendous danger. History contains plenty of instances of the vagaries to which

[1] p. 14. [2] p. 17.

the exaggerated claim to individual "light" may bring a person. For that reason Baron von Hügel insists on the other two elements in religion. The Church, with its authoritative tradition, and the Reason of man are as truly among God's gifts to him as the Inner Light can be.

Though it is the essence of Law's doctrine that the treasure is hidden within man, yet no one need imagine that there is nothing more to be done; Law insists that a half-hearted search will never avail: "Thy reason and senses, thy heart and passions have turned all their attention to the poor concerns of this life, and therefore thou art a stranger to this principle of Heaven, this riches of Eternity within thee. For as God is not, cannot be, truly found by any worshipper but those who worship Him in spirit and in truth, so this Light and Spirit, though always within us, is not, cannot be, found, felt, or enjoyed but by those whose whole Spirit is turned to it." [1]

Further on he tells us "the first Seed of life, which is sown into the soul as the gift or grace of God to fallen man, is itself the Light and Spirit of God"; [2] and he claims that it is "common to all men."

It would seem that to Law God can be discerned in the heart of man, as to Words-

[1] ibid., p. 14. [2] p. 15.

worth or Keble He is found in the heart of the physical world. In this sense then, man being of course part of "nature," Law is, properly speaking, a nature mystic. Yet a difference divides him and Wordsworth. In Wordsworth the whole, body and soul, material and immaterial, stands over against the physical world ; in Law's case, the man is, as it were, split in two, and as he looks at himself he finds God there. Law's doctrine becomes explicable and comprehensible, because, like all the mystics, he realizes "the spark at the apex of man's soul" ; he expresses himself just so : "He has a spark of the Light and Spirit of God, as a supernatural gift of God given unto the birth of his soul, to bring forth by degrees a new birth of that life which was lost in Paradise. This holy spark of the divine nature within him has a natural, strong, and almost infinite tendency, a reaching after that eternal Light and Spirit of God from whence it came forth. It came forth from God, it came out of God, it partaketh of the Divine nature, and therefore it is always in a state of tendency and return to God." There is his belief in the immanence of God in man. But he is no pantheist, he knows well the transcendence of God : "On the other hand, the Deity, as considered in itself and without the soul of man, has an infinite, unchangeable tendency of love and desire

towards the soul of man, to unite and communicate its own riches and glories to it." [1]

It is true that in one passage he speaks as if this light, while a God-sent gift, is not in itself actually divine; but here, tempted probably by the snares lurking in all illustrations, he allowed himself to stray aside from his settled belief: "When, therefore, the first spark of a desire after God arises in thy soul, cherish it with all thy care; give all thy heart unto it; it is nothing less than a touch of the divine loadstone that is to draw thee out of the vanity of time unto the riches of eternity. Get up therefore and follow it as gladly as the Wise Men of the East followed the Star from heaven that appeared unto them. It will do for thee as the Star did for them; it will lead thee to the birth of Jesus, not in a stable at Bethlehem in Judaea, but to the birth of Jesus in the centre of thine own fallen soul." [2]

He ends this treatise on *The Spirit of Prayer* with a brief exposition of the mystic's progress, which accords precisely with all genuine mystical teaching. He assumes that a man has come to a sense of his own utter unworthiness, of his own personal decline from the best which was in him, from all that he might have made of that best; and then lucidly, convincingly, and so briefly he traces the Mystical Way: "The

[1] ibid., p. 16. [2] p. 16.

painful sense and feeling of what you are, kindled into a working state of sensibility by the Light of God within you, is the Fire and Light from whence your Spirit of Prayer proceeds. In its first kindling nothing is found or felt but pain, wrath, and darkness, as it is to be seen in the first kindling of every heat or fire. And therefore its first prayer is nothing else but a sense of penitence, self-condemnation, confession, and humility. This prayer of humility is met by the Divine Love, the mercifulness of God embraces it, and then its prayer is changed into hymns and songs and thanksgivings. When this state of fervour has done its work, has melted away all earthly passions and affections, and left no inclination in the soul but to delight in God alone, then its prayer changes again. It has now come so near to God, has found such an union with Him, that it does not so much pray as live in God. Its prayer is not any particular action, is not the work of any particular faculty, not confined to times or word or place, but is the work of its whole being, which continually stands in fullness of faith, in purity of love, in absolute resignation, to do and be what and how its beloved pleases. This is the last state of the Spirit of Prayer, and is its highest union with God in this life." [1]

[1] p. 21.

Nothing separates the spirit and teaching of this passage from the mysticism of Rolle or Hilton; Law doubtless owes a great debt to Boehme, but not here; the lines are instinct with the restrained rapture which is so characteristic of the great English Mystics. These extracts could easily be added to from his other writings; but they contain his whole doctrine, and so suffice.

Dr. Bigg in his Introduction to an edition of Law's *Serious Call* declared: "There was not a grain of poetry in Law's composition," a statement which seems to be traversed by passages in his mystical writings. Out of the unemotional, critical, unenthusiastic, chill eighteenth century come from Law's pen pages of sin-struck sorrow, of illumined insight, of ardent conviction and mystical rapture which might sometimes well have been the work of the English fourteenth century.

Traherne, as a nature mystic, stands somewhere between Law and Wordsworth. It was through nature, and that, so he himself tells us, from his earliest childhood's days that he came to "practise the Presence of God," as Brother Lawrence taught men to phrase it. But the beauty of nature and the existence of God were, for him, inextricably mixed. The following passage may be familiar to a few; it shows clearly the close inter-con-

nection in his mind between nature and God. Since Mr. Dobell published the *Centuries of Meditation* it has been quoted occasionally, and if taken alone might mislead. Read in its proper context, it leaves untouched Traherne's often reiterated conviction that in his progress in the spiritual life the physical world took precedence, and that he passed through nature to God, not in any pantheistic fashion, because always the Immanent led him to the Transcendent. The *Centuries* give a reader the impression that, child and man alike, he was *directly* taught by God, Who, so far as this mortal was concerned, brought him through the created thing, as if the world were the outward form and God the inner reality ; the material being once more sacramentally the vehicle of the spiritual, the world having been made for man, and not because God needed it :—

> And what than this can be more plain and clear ?
> What truth than this more evident appear ?
> The Godhead cannot prize
> The sun at all, nor yet the skies,
> Or air, or earth, or trees, or seas,
> Or stars unless the soul of man they please.
> He neither sees with human eyes,
> Nor needs Himself seas, skies,
> Or earth, or anything : He draws
> No breath, nor eats or drinks by Nature's laws.[1]

[1] *The Poetical Works of Thomas Traherne*, p. 85.

The passage is as follows: "Once I remember (I think I was about four years old) when I thus reasoned with myself, sitting in a little obscure room in my father's poor house; 'If there be a God, certainly He must be infinite in Goodness'; and that I was prompted to by a real whispering instinct of Nature. And if He be infinite in Goodness, and a perfect Being in Wisdom and Love, certainly He must do most glorious things, and give us infinite riches, how comes it to pass therefore that I am so poor? I thought I could not believe Him a God to me, unless all His power were employed to glorify me. I knew not then my Soul or Body; nor did I think of the Heavens and the Earth, the rivers and the stars, the sun or the seas; all those were lost and absent from me. But when I found them made out of nothing for me, then I had a God indeed, whom I could rejoice in." [1]

As we watch Traherne in large measure, and Wordsworth in a still greater degree, passing from the "phenomenal" beauty of nature to find the "God Who hideth Himself," it may not be irrelevant to recall part of that passage from Plato where Diotima, "the stranger woman," is discoursing to Socrates about love: "The true order of going or being

[1] *Centuries of Meditation*, iii. 16.

led by another to the things of love is to use the beauties of earth as steps along which he mounts upwards, for the sake of that other beauty, going from one to two, and from two to all fair forms, and from fair forms to fair practices, and from fair practices to fair notions, until from fair notions he arrives at the notion of absolute beauty, and at last knows what the essence of beauty is."[1]

In one short sentence Maximus Tyrius (the second century Platonist) sums up this progress: "The beauty of the flower awakens in the intelligence the thought of God."[2]

Some sections at the beginning of his second "Century" plainly state that Traherne really perceived the "natural" world first; not God, nor man, nor spirit, but the physical creation: "The Services which the world doth you are transcended to all imagination. Did it only sustain your body and preserve your life, and comfort your senses, you were bound to value it as much as those services were worth; but it discovers the being of God unto you, it opens His nature and shows you His Wisdom, Goodness, and Power, it magnifies His Love unto you, it serves Angels and men for you, it entertains you with many lovely and

[1] *Symposium*, § 211.

[2] Quoted by Dr. C. Bigg in *The Church's Task under the Roman Empire*, p. 79.

glorious objects, it feeds you with joys, and becomes a theme that furnishes you with perpetual praises and thanksgivings, it inflameth you with the love of God, and is the link of your union and communion with Him. . . .

"Remember always, how great soever the world is, it is the beginning of Gifts, the first thing which God bestows to every infant, by the very right of his nativity."

That Traherne means the *natural world* as it comes from the hands of God is perfectly obvious from his account of his subsequent loss of this primal treasure : "The first Light which shined in my Infancy in its primitive and innocent clarity was totally eclipsed ; insomuch that I was fain to learn it all again. If you ask me how it was eclipsed ? Truly by the customs and manners of men, which like contrary winds blew it out ; by an innumerable company of other objects, rude, vulgar, and worthless things, that like so many loads of earth and dung did overwhelm and bury it ; by the impetuous torrent of wrong desires in all others whom I saw or knew that carried me away and alienated me from it ; by a whole sea of other matters and concernments that covered and drowned it ; finally by the evil influence of a bad education that did not foster and cherish it. All men's thoughts and words were about other matters. They all prized

new things which I did not dream of."[1] And again: "So I began among my fellows to prize a drum, a fine coat, a penny, a gilded book, etc., who never before dreamed of any such wealth. Goodly objects to drown all the knowledge of Heaven and Earth! As for the Heavens and the Sun and Stars they disappeared and were no more unto me than the bare walls. So that the strange riches of man's invention quite overcame the riches of Nature, being learned more laboriously and in the second place."[2]

From the dawn of this country's life Englishmen have loved nature; among them it would be hard to find one who surpassed Traherne. He goes on to describe his state of misery when he was deprived of his true wealth, and how it was when he was in this condition that he experienced the discontent at his poverty, which he expressed in the sixteenth section, quoted a few pages back.

Little by little, and when he was alone, his "Soul would return to itself," and then he forgot these worthless things thrust at him by his fellow-creatures; so that in this happier mood his "thoughts would be deeply engaged with inquiries: How the Earth did end? Whether walls did bound it? or sudden precipices? Or whether the Heavens by degrees

[1] *Centuries of Meditation*, iii. 7. [2] iii. 10.

did come to touch it ; so that the face of the Earth and Heaven were so near, that a man with difficulty could creep under." [1]

Slowly the beauty of nature filled his thoughts again, and emptied his memory of those "rude, vulgar, and worthless" things which had driven out his first love ; till at last he could say : "By all which I perceive that my soul was made to live in communion with God, in all places of His dominion, and to be satisfied with the highest reason in all things. After which it so eagerly aspired, that I thought all the gold and silver in the world but dirt, in comparison of satisfaction in any of these." [2]

Finally, it must be noted that, however much he prized it, Traherne could not rest satisfied with the world's external beauty ; it was, no doubt, the "schoolmaster" to bring him to God ; but it was only a means, the pedagogue was bound to give way to the Father, the physical world to its Maker, or Traherne would have been "of all men the most miserable" : "Another time, in a lowering and sad evening, being alone in the field, where all things were dead and quiet, a certain want and horror fell on me, beyond imagination. The unprofitableness and silence of the place dissatisfied me ; its wideness terrified me ; from the

[1] ibid., ii. 17. [2] ii. 18.

utmost ends of the earth fears surrounded me. . . . I was a weak and little child, and had forgotten there was a man alive in the earth. Yet something also of hope and expectation comforted me from every border. This taught me . . . that I was made to hold a communion with the secrets of Divine Providence in all the world. . . . The clear assurance of treasures everywhere, God's care and love, His goodness, wisdom, and power, His presence and watchfulness in all the ends of the earth, were my strength and assurance for ever ; and that these things, being absent to my eye, were my joys and consolations, as present to my understanding as the wideness and emptiness of the Universe which I saw before me." [1]

In his poem *Desire* he returns to the same theme of the impossibility of *satisfying* the spirit of man with anything short of or other than the knowledge and vision of God.

Baron von Hügel once included Wordsworth in a list of men who had in their nature "mystical elements."

More than that need not be claimed for Wordsworth ; yet it would be a vital blunder to omit him from the English mystics, because, whether people read his poems or not, it is

[1] iii. 23.

admitted that he is the representative nature mystic of our race. A love of nature has endured in us from the beginning; it is prominent in our early literature, and did not quite die in the Augustan age of satires, epistles, and essays. But, beyond dispute, Wordsworth was, from his earliest days of consciousness and apprehension of surroundings, possessed of it with singular intensity; it was an integral part of his inmost man.

In the Introduction I claimed that this love of, amounting to kinship with, nature may well lead on to mysticism. It did so with Wordsworth up to a point. And yet about him there always clings, sometimes more, sometimes less obviously, a ray of that dry, chill century in which he was born. His seed-time years—he was born in 1770, and published his first poems in 1793—saw the appearance of Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*, Burke's *French Revolution*, Paine's *Rights of Man*, Godwin's *Political Justice*; strange food, most of it, for a poet, more especially as of the Poetry of Idealism there was none save some of Blake's. Of course Wordsworth was heir of all the past ages. Behind him stretched a long roll of poets, of all their work he was a freeman. But a writer, particularly perhaps a poet, is susceptible to his own surrounding age and atmosphere. No one could call those particular years in England a favourable

environment for mysticism, or indeed for the expression of any high spirituality.

In that unsympathetic moment, Wordsworth's youth was strangely moved by a Presence in nature of which his contemporaries, seemingly, remained unaware. It is quite impossible to hope to say anything new of a writer so much written about, or to find a quotation illustrative of this quality in him which has not been quoted innumerable times, but possibly those beautiful lines in which, after lamenting his failure,—

> a false steward who hath much received
> And renders nothing back,—

he sets forth the high chances of his early days, can never be quite staled :—

> Was it for this
> That one, the fairest of all rivers, loved
> To blend his murmurs with my nurse's song,
> And, from his alder shades and rocky falls,
> And from his fords and shallows, sent a voice
> That flowed along my dreams? For this, didst thou,
> O Derwent, winding among grassy holms
> When I was looking on, a babe in arms,
> Make ceaseless music that composed my thoughts
> To more than infant softness, giving me
> Amid the fretful dwellings of mankind
> A foretaste, a dim earnest, of the calm
> That Nature breathes among the hills and groves.[1]

[1] *The Prelude*, Bk. I.

That lasting, soundless peace which nature gives, and which endures in times and places from which external peace is exiled, has, and must have, a spiritual, a mystical element; it is of the soul, not only or mainly of the senses.

There may be too strong a tendency to think of Wordsworth as one who always saw nature under a gentle, it would not be too much to say a tame guise, in the mood, e.g., of *The Lines Written in Early Spring* :—

> The birds around me hopped and played,
> Their thoughts I cannot measure :—
> But the least motion which they made,
> It seemed a thrill of pleasure.
>
> The budding twigs spread out their fan,
> To catch the breezy air ;
> And I must think, do all I can,
> That there was pleasure there.

But this childlike, almost childish, appreciation of nature yielded to a higher, sterner, grander vision :—

> Praise to the end !
> Thanks to the means which Nature deigned to employ ;
> Whether her fearless visitings, or those
> That came with soft alarm, like hurtless light
> Opening the peaceful clouds ; or she would use
> Severer interventions, ministry
> More palpable, as best might suit her aim.[1]

[1] *The Prelude.*

Or again, in one of his later poems he writes in this profounder mood, and here with much more definite ascription of the visible glory to its invisible Source :—

> Thine is the tranquil hour, purpureal Eve !
> But long as god-like wish, or hope divine,
> Informs my spirit, ne'er can I believe
> That this magnificence is wholly thine !
> —From worlds not quickened by the sun
> A portion of the gift is won.[1]

There are in the first book of *The Prelude* two excellent examples of his awe of nature ; it was by no means only the *riant* joyousness of which he was aware. One is his well-known account of his playing truant in a boat on the lake late at night. Into the midst of a boyish freak there strikes suddenly the grimness of the North, the mistily-understood sense of avenging power, the personification of natural force, out of which, in Anglo-Saxon times, sprang the dreaded goddess, Wyrd :—

> from behind that craggy steep till then
> The horizon's bound, a huge peak, black and huge,
> As if with voluntary power instinct
> Upreared its head. I struck and struck again,
> And growing still in stature the grim shape
> Towered up between me and the stars, and still,
> For so it seemed, with purpose of its own
> And measured motion like a living thing,
> Strode after me.

[1] *Composed on an Evening of extraordinary Splendour and Beauty.*

That is more than "a poet's fancy"; deep is answering to deep; nature for the moment is more than physical, and so can strike a responsive chord in a human soul.

Perhaps subtler still is that other experience following on a meaner escapade, for this time he had stolen the poor prey from another boy's trap :—

> strong desire
> O'erpowered my better reason, and the bird
> Which was the captive of another's toil
> Became my prey; and when the deed was done
> I heard among the solitary hills
> Low breathings coming after me, and sounds
> Of undistinguishable motion, steps
> Almost as silent as the turf they trod.

Mystical, too, is Wordsworth's sense of his loss of that intuition of a Presence behind the visible world, that vision which in his unsullied youth was constant with him; mystical, too, his petition for its restoration, a petition for the time not granted :—

> Dread Power whom peace and calmness serve
> No less than Nature's threatening voice,
> If aught unworthy be my choice,
> From Thee if I would swerve;
> Oh, let Thy grace remind me of the light
> Full early lost, and fruitlessly deplored;
> Which, at the moment, on my waking sight
> Appears to shine, by miracle restored;
> My soul, though yet confined to earth,
> Rejoices in a second birth!

—'Tis past, the visionary splendour fades :
And night approaches with her shades.[1]

It would seem from such passages as these, and from many others which could easily be collected, e.g.—

moon and stars
Were shining o'er my head. I was alone
And seemed to be a trouble to the peace
That dwelt among them.—

that Wordsworth's response to and stimulus by nature were more manysided than Traherne's, against whom, indeed, the charge of monotony has been urged. Traherne seems rather like a happy child tireless among inexhaustible treasures ; while Wordsworth is an expectant spirit, on tiptoe for every passing influence. It is noteworthy, too, that he responded with all his senses : sound, colour, form, fragrance, each had its message for him ; nothing was too small nor too big, too rare or too common; none failed of its message :—

Should the chosen guide
Be nothing better than a wandering cloud
I cannot miss my way,[2]

he cries ; and then, in the famous lines written on Calais beach, how all the senses and the

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[1] ibid. [2] *The Prelude*, Bk. I.

soul combine to receive nature's imperishable gift :—

> The holy time is quiet as a Nun
> Breathless with adoration ; the broad sun
> Is sinking down in its tranquillity ;
> The gentleness of heaven broods o'er the sea.
> Listen ! the mighty Being is awake,
> And doth with His eternal motion make
> A sound like thunder—everlastingly.

In the Tintern Abbey lines there is yet another aspect :—

> The sounding cataract
> Haunted me like a passion : the tall rock,
> The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,
> Their colours and their forms, were then to me
> An appetite.

More impalpable, more spiritual is his mood when he can say—

> I—while the sweet breath of heaven
> Was blowing on my body—felt within
> A correspondent breeze.

Wordsworth responded to all this material loveliness because to him it was only the phenomenal which veiled the Reality :—

> Beauty—a living Presence of the earth
> Surpassing the most fair ideal Forms
> Which craft of delicate Spirits hath composed
> From Earth's materials—waits upon my steps ;
> Pitches her tent before me as I move,
> An hourly neighbour.[1]

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[1] *The Recluse.*

"Mystical elements," that is all that Baron von Hügel claimed for Wordsworth. Perhaps the fact is that he had less the love and humility of the mystic who, through purgation, gropes his way by the flash and gleam of illumination to final union, than the vision of a prophet conscious of some mission to lead, enlighten, and instruct others. The mystic is not didactic, and it was very difficult always for Wordsworth to rid himself entirely of that attitude, which occasionally betrayed him into dreadful *banalité*, into such an ending, for example, as the last verse of the *Lines written in Early Spring*.

Had Wordsworth lived in a different age, in a less conventional religious atmosphere, he might have had that sense of personal sin which provides so often the reason for the mystic's first step on "the asperous way."

It is a common-place of criticism to say that Wordsworth, pre-eminently among English poets, was aware of a Real Presence behind the obvious face of nature :—

> I felt
> Gleams like the flashing of a shield ;—the Earth
> And common face of Nature spake to me
> Rememberable things.[1]

What is lacking in Wordsworth's mysticism is the adoring, personal awareness of and long-

[1] *The Prelude*, Bk. I.

ing for the "hidden God." To appreciate this we need but compare these familiar lines, perhaps the most enraptured he ever wrote,—

> Ye Presences of Nature in the sky
> And on the Earth! Ye Visions of the hills!
> And souls of lonely places! can I think
> A vulgar hope was yours when ye employed
> Such ministry, when ye through many a year
> Haunting me thus among my boyish sports,
> On caves and trees, upon the woods and hills,
> Impressed upon all forms the characters
> Of danger or desire; and thus did make
> The surface of the universal earth
> With triumph and delight, with hope and fear,
> Work like a sea?[1]

with, shall we say? the close of Rolle's *Form of Perfect Living*: "He makes them gather up their heart to them and fasten it only in Him, and opens to the eye of their souls the gate of Heaven; and then the fire of love verily lies in their heart, and burns within. . . . For contemplation is a sight, and they see into Heaven with their ghostly eye."

Wordsworth is enchanted with nature's loveliness and withdrawn peace: in glorious musical verse he responds to her call. But the secret of man's hope is enshrined in Rolle's unjewelled but adoring prose.

Wordsworth's very didacticism, however, preserves him from turning this response to

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[1] ibid.

nature into mere pantheism. Not burning love, for he is too calm ; not keen spirituality, for that is too often blunted by a strange common-place; but his strong moral sense keeps him from an impersonal pantheism. The man who wrote the *Ode to Duty*, and in particular that stanza—

> Stern Lawgiver! yet thou dost wear
> The Godhead's most benignant grace ;
> Nor know we anything so fair
> As is the smile upon thy face :
> Flowers laugh before thee on their beds
> And fragrance in thy footing treads;
> Thou dost preserve the stars from wrong ;
> And the most ancient heavens, through thee, are fresh and strong,

though he might and did lack the familiar loving sense of a Person close at hand, at all events recognized His existence. The Immanence of God in nature is emphasized by Wordsworth, may seem, as he stands in the midst of her loveliness, to predominate in his mind ; but the transcendence is always acknowledged : and so it can truly be said of him as Francis Thompson said of that other Francis, of Assisi, that he "discerned through the Lamp Beauty the Light God."

CHAPTER VII

The Tractarians and After

WITH the exception of the Cambridge Platonists, whose work has been omitted here as its interest seems to be more definitely philosophical and literary than genuinely mystical, England has been curiously immune from those "schools" of philosophy, theology, poetry, and art with which France, at any rate recently, has been so familiar, especially in poetry. But one English "school" sprang up, without forethought or plan or deliberate intention, one whose influence is ever growing still — the school of the Oxford Tractarians, whose birthday was, as is well known, July 14, 1833, when Mr. Keble preached the University Sermon on *National Apostasy*. Unique in character, this association of men, at once distinguished for their intellectual power and marked by their peculiar goodness, achieved its work by blending theology, philosophy, and poetry. This is true literally and individually of three out of the four original great leaders, Keble, Newman, and Isaac Williams, Dr. Pusey confining himself mainly to theology.

I have nothing to do here with the great controversy between Rome and Canterbury, nor with reasons why some "went" and others "stayed," but rather with that inner conviction of the personal reality and nearness of God, and of the other world, of that sense in fact of the supernatural which impelled them, whether as Roman or Anglican Churchmen, to spend themselves utterly in attempting to strip off from the hearts and minds of their countrymen the devastating sterility, the flattening conventionalism which was killing spirituality in many English men and women, and which abundantly justified John Keble in denouncing the National Apostasy. Doctrines, ceremonies, ritual, all these of necessity entered into the struggle, and soon bulked largely, often strangely and erroneously, in the popular imagination. But the flame of the Tractarian Movement was love of God, Whom these men "knew directly"; and their purpose was the reclaiming and winning of other souls to do likewise.

The three whom I have mentioned together stand out conspicuously as of the mystical temperament: perhaps if Pusey seems less obviously so it is because of his learning and scholarship which fixed themselves in the popular mind. R. W. Church, of the next generation, may be classed with the three.

Having commented upon the frequency and

completeness with which Newman could, almost simultaneously, approve of and dislike some plan or theory, Mr. Wilfrid Ward wrote these words: "In one so subtle, complex, intensely sensitive, these opposite feelings all have an intelligible place. A mind and imagination singularly alive to every aspect and every detail of each place, a singularly sensitive temperament naturally views a prospect with mixed feelings. One aspect makes him sad, another makes him happy. But to the world at large such combinations are often perplexing." [1]

Probably the subtle complexity of Newman's nature was as puzzling as that of Gladstone to their contemporaries. It is a humorous fact that to-day the era which was distinguished by the work of two such startlingly unusual and complex characters should so often be dismissed by youthful critics as negligible, almost contemptible.

However much people may agree with Mr. Ward's view of the kaleidoscopic character of Newman's activity, all who know anything about him will agree that one of his convictions never faltered or changed, not even in his darkest days of disappointment, and that is his conviction of a divine Light always, everywhere guiding him.

In the midst of his Sicilian illness, in 1833,

[1] *Life of John Henry, Cardinal Newman*, vol. i, p. 17.

he kept saying to himself, "I have not sinned against light"; it is not only *Lead, kindly Light* but other poems in *Lyra Apostolica* which show this unalterable conviction; e.g. the first stanza of No. x, *The Pains of Memory*, and the first one of No. xxiii:—

> Lord, in this dust Thy sovereign voice
> First quickened love divine;
> I am all Thine,—Thy care and choice,
> My very praise is Thine.

Still more definitely he claims illumination in No. xxxii, *Discipline*:—

> When I look back upon my former race,
> Seasons I see, at which the Inward Ray
> More brightly burned, or guided some new way.

Among the contradictions which filled his life is the one which is manifested in that which is perhaps his most important work: viz. the strange fact that while he himself needed, so it would seem, no reasoned theory or argumentative basis for his profound belief in God ("luminously self-evident" was his phrase), because he was truly a mystic, and could not, with all his acknowledged "tendency to general scepticism," rid himself had he wished of the sense of God's presence,[1] yet he was perhaps more convinced than any of his contemporaries of the necessity, then

[1] He says expressly that his sense of God's presence was never "dimmed by even a passing shadow." (*Letters*, edited by Miss Anne Mozley, vol. i, p. 14.)

and there, of making the claims of religious belief reasonable, so that average people could and would grasp them. With penetrating foresight he perceived the coming inrush of materialistic unbelief; and the question which he put to himself as a young man at Oxford when, in 1826, he began the course of those famous fifteen sermons, the *University Sermons*, and which impelled him when he was sixty-nine to write *The Grammar of Assent*, was—How can the reasonableness of religious belief be brought home to all men of good-will?

It is a tenable proposition that such a question may best be answered by a mystic, for he is so certain of his knowledge by "a more excellent way," that he need not fear to give, as some sometimes seem to do, Reason her full scope and due.

In 1847, when writing to J. D. Dalgairns about the proposed French edition of these Sermons, Newman said: "I am not maintaining what I say is all true, but I wish to *assist in investigating* and bringing to light *great* principles necessary for the day. . . . And now, after reading these Sermons, I must say, I think they are, as a whole, the best things I have written, and I cannot believe they are not Catholic, and will not be useful." [1]

Of course, every one would expect his

[1] Quoted in *Life of John Henry, Cardinal Newman*, vol. i, p. 173. By Wilfrid Ward.

mystical temperament to appear as it does in his poems ; but it is not less apparent, and is perhaps more potent in the *University Sermons* and the *Grammar of Assent*. Another sermon, which in time stands between these two, has in it some mystical touches, and may be dealt with first here, out of its natural order, that called "Illuminating Grace," published among his *Discourses to Mixed Congregations*, which he preached in Birmingham in 1849.

At the outset Newman states that man, when created, "was endowed withal with gifts above his own nature, by means of which that nature was perfected," and that when he fell he forfeited these gifts, one of them being that of "spiritual sight."

He nowhere in the sermon defines this spiritual sight, but by it he evidently meant a gift which enabled man not to opine but to know. He then goes on to consider the relation between reason and this knowledge or sight. Reason he expressly describes as "a sort of substitute for sight." [1]

He maintains in effect that Reason alone can never give us more than what is in the last resort an opinion. Such an opinion may be quite often the truth, but the weak point is that Reason alone cannot assure us that it is so. What, then, do we need ? He takes an

[1] *Discourses to Mixed Congregations*, p. 173.

illustration to help, comparing the human eye + physical light to the human reason + supernatural light. His line of argument is that though we might by groping in the dark get hold of some material object we sought, we could not be sure it was the very thing—it might only be something which felt like it —until we were able to procure a light and *see* it with our eyes. Then he argues that as the human eye, however good or healthy, cannot *see* in the dark, so Reason, though it may stumble on the truth, cannot, any more than a physical eye in the dark, be sure till it has supernatural light.

The question naturally occurs here, Does Newman refer to the mystic's illumination? Probably at most only to its potentiality. The "spark at the apex of the soul" has by some been identified with "the light that lighteth every man coming into the world"; still not by any means does every mortal develop into a mystic.

Newman certainly speaks as if this supernatural light could be every man's gift; but though this would not separate it, necessarily, from mystical light, if S. John's be that, it seems more likely that he was thinking of something rather different, for the discourse drifts off into the contention that no one possesses this gift in perfection save those who join the Roman Communion.

If when he used the phrase "spiritual sight," Newman meant mystical illumination, it is plain that he agreed with some people that mysticism is impossible outside the Roman Communion; since, towards the end of the sermon, he said: "The great and general truth remains that nature cannot see God; and that grace is the sole manner of seeing Him; and that while grace enables us to do so, it also brings us into His Church, and is never given us for our illumination, without being also given to make us Catholics."[1] However, since these words do not, for example, exclude the explanation that a gift may be received and thwarted, and further in the light of a letter to Keble, in which Newman wrote: "You are always with me, a thought of reverence and love, and there is nothing I love better than you and Isaac and Copeland, and many others I could name, except Him whom I ought to love best of all, supremely,"[2] it seems probable that the strictest and narrowest interpretation possible of them might be the wrong one; for it is hardly conceivable that he did not consider these men as sharing in this light.

Controversy, however inevitable, results often in darkening counsel, and is still more barren of good when it obscures Truth and

[1] ibid., p. 189.

[2] Quoted in *Life of John Henry, Cardinal Newman*, by Wilfrid Ward. Vol. i, p. 591.

blunts Love. It is wiser to look for men's real, most illumined, meaning not in their controversial but in their philosophical, still more in their devotional, moments. In Newman's case such "moments" occur in the fifteen *University Sermons*, wherein he was attempting to unfold during "those trying five years from 1841 to 1845" the nature and relation of Faith and Reason; in the *Poems*, and finally in his great book—written when he was sixty-nine, written years after that period in the late 'fifties and early 'sixties when he thought so hopelessly of himself as too old, too disappointed, too negligible to do anything more which might be of use to his fellow men—*The Grammar of Assent*, a wonderful achievement even for him when he was on the verge of seventy.

Of the fifteen *University Sermons*, Newman himself wrote to James Hope that he considered it "the best, not the most perfect, book I have done. I mean there is more to develop in it though it is imperfect." His estimate of it to Father Dalgairns has been already quoted.

These sermons surely can never perish while the English speech endures. Richard Holt Hutton, an acute and delicate critic, compared them with those others to *Mixed Congregations*, saying, as he spoke of these latter, "though they have not to me quite

the delicate charm of the reserve and, I might almost say, the shy passion of his Oxford Sermons, they represent the full-blown blossom of his genius, while the former only show it in bud."

Before we pass to consider the mystical element in the *University Sermons*, this critical confession justifies some germane quotations from that most profound and beautiful Discourse on the Passion, the most beautiful of all those to *Mixed Congregations*, a supreme example of Newman's mysticism and devotional insight. *The Dolorous Passion* of Catherine Emmerich is one of the classics of mysticism; yet Newman's great exposition of "The Mental Sufferings of our Lord in His Passion" is all lit with a passionate flame of love which comprehends the subtlest possibilities of spiritual agony, and which conveys something far transcending all pictures of His bodily suffering. Only the eye of the mystic could have penetrated those dreadful depths of impalpable pain: "When He determined to suffer the pain of His vicarious passion, whatever He did, He did as the Wise Man says, *instanter*, earnestly 'with His might'; He did not do it by halves, He did not turn away His mind from the suffering as we do—(how should He, Who came to suffer, Who could not have suffered but of His own act?) no, He

did not say and unsay, do and undo; He said and He did. . . . He took a body in order that He might suffer; He became man that He might suffer as man; and when His hour was come, that hour of Satan and of darkness, . . . He offered Himself wholly, a holocaust, a whole burnt-offering;—as the whole of His Body stretched out upon the Cross, so the whole of His Soul, His whole advertence, His whole consciousness, a mind awake, a sense acute, a living co-operation, a present absolute intention, not a virtual permission, not a heathen submission. . . .

"Pain is to be measured by the power of realizing it. God was the sufferer, God suffered in His human nature; the Sufferings belonged to God, and were drunk up, were drained out to the bottom of the chalice, because God drank them; not tasted or sipped, not flavoured, disguised by human medicaments, as man disposes of the cup of anguish."

When Newman has thus brought before us, as perhaps no other writer of our age could, the nature of the Sufferer, he turns to the nature of the sufferings: "His very memory is laden with every sin which has been committed since the fall, in all regions of the earth, with the pride of the old giants, and the lusts of the five cities, and the obduracy of Egypt, and the ambition of Babel, and the

unthankfulness and scorn of Israel." Then follows the heart-piercing reminder: "Thy dearest are there, Thy Saints and Thy chosen are upon Thee; the Three Apostles, Peter and James and John; but not as comforters, but as accusers. . . . All are there but one. . . . She will be near Thee on the Cross, She is separated from Thee in the garden . . . her virgin ear may not take in, nor may her immaculate heart conceive, what is now in vision before Thee. None was equal to the weight but God."

As the woe culminates and presses in on Newman's inner sight, he gathers it all up in a passionate torrent: "It is the long history of a world, and God alone can bear the load of it. Hopes blighted, vows broken, lights quenched, warnings scorned, opportunities lost; the innocent betrayed, the young hardened, the penitent relapsing, the just overcome, the aged failing; the sophistry of misbelief, the wilfulness of passion, the obduracy of pride, the tyranny of habit, the canker of remorse; the wasting fever of care, the anguish of shame, the pining of disappointment, the sickness of despair; such cruel, such pitiable spectacles, such heartrending, revolting, detestable, maddening scenes; nay, the haggard faces, the convulsed lips, the flushed cheek, the dark brow of the willing slaves of evil, they are all before Him now; they are upon

Him and in Him. They are with Him instead of that ineffable peace which has inhabited His soul since the moment of His conception. They are upon Him, they are all but His own ; He cries to His Father as if He were the criminal, not the Victim."

By the senses, by imagination, it would be possible to picture our Lord's physical sufferings. Without the mystical temperament Newman could not have so grasped His mental sufferings.

Newman did not work from the devotional standpoint only : he is particularly noteworthy, and not only among English Mystics, for, if one may say so, justifying mysticism from that of philosophy too. The main purpose of the *University Sermons* was not mystical but eminently practical ; their subject was the Philosophy of Faith, their aim to provide a *reasonable* ground for religious belief to all men of good will.

They are perhaps less difficult than *The Grammar of Assent*, but no man, however precise his grasp, or delicate and apposite his style, can make an easy path for others in that ultimate region where philosophy and theology meet. He starts by drawing a distinction between the philosopher and the Christian as such : "The philosopher confesses himself to be imperfect ; the Christian feels himself to be sinful and corrupt . . . he has, by sinning,

introduced a blemish into the work of God . . . he is guilty in the court of heaven, and is continually doing things odious in the sight of the Divine holiness." [1] In the next sermon he gives an added mystical touch to this distinction, which no one but a mystic would have put just so : "The philosopher aspires towards a divine *principle* ; the Christian towards a Divine Agent." [2]

He passes on to a second distinction, between Natural and Revealed Religion, making the careful reservation that even natural religion is not the work of unaided reason : "When, then, religion of some sort is said to be *natural*, it is not here meant that any religious system has been actually traced out by unaided reason. We know of no such system, because we know of no time or country in which human reason *was* unaided." [3]

At the same time he arraigns the radical weakness of the lack of objectivity inseparable from natural religion : "While, then, Natural Religion was not without provision for all the deepest and truest religious feelings, yet presenting no tangible history of the Deity, no points of His personal character (if we may so speak without irreverence), it wanted that most efficient incentive to all action, a starting or rallying point—an object on which the

[1] *University Sermons*, No. i. [2] ibid., No. ii. [3] ibid.

affections could be placed, and the energies concentrated." [1]

In the great closing chapter of *The Grammar of Assent* Newman makes this same distinction, but there, with the glowing eloquence of a swan-song, urges the supreme claim of Christianity: "Revelation begins where Natural Religion fails. The Religion of Nature is a mere inchoation, and needs a complement—it can have but one complement, and that very complement is Christianity.

"Natural Religion is based upon the sense of sin; it recognizes the disease, but it cannot find, it does but look out for the remedy. That remedy, both for guilt and for moral impotence, is found in the central doctrine of Revelation, the Mediation of Christ. . . .

"Thus it is that Christianity is the fulfilment of the promise made to Abraham, and of the Mosaic revelations; this is how it has been able from the first to occupy the world and gain a hold on every class of human society to which its preachers reached. . . . It has with it that gift of staunching and healing the one deep wound of human nature, which avails more for its success than a full encyclopaedia of scientific knowledge and a whole library of controversy, and therefore it must last while human nature lasts. It is a living truth which

[1] Sermon ii.

never can grow old . . . its power is in the present. It is no dreary matter of antiquarianism ; we do not contemplate it in conclusions drawn from dumb documents and dead events, but by faith exercised in ever-living objects, and by the appropriation and use of ever-recurring gifts." [1]

The expression differs widely from that of Richard Rolle, or Mother Julian, or Henry Vaughan ; but, for all that, we have here the mystic's penetration to the Reality which underlies this transitory, shifting world.

Again with mystical insight he reveals not the distinction but the relation between natural and revealed religion : — "There is perhaps no greater satisfaction to the Christian than that which arises from his perceiving that the revealed system is rooted deep in the natural course of things, of which it is merely the result and completion ; that his Saviour has interpreted for him the faint or broken accents of nature ; and that in them, so interpreted, he has, as if in some old prophecy, at once the evidence and the lasting memorial of the truths of the Gospel." [2]

If Newman be right in this plea, those who claim that "nature mystics" can be truly mystical are justified in their contention.

Equally and beautifully inspired by mystical

[1] *The Grammar of Assent*, pp. 487–8. [2] Sermon ii.

vision is his assertion about the nature and work of revelation: "Revelation meets us with simple and distinct *facts* and *actions*, not with painful inductions from existing phenomena, not with generalized laws, or metaphysical conjectures, but with *Jesus and the Resurrection*; and, '*if Christ be not risen*,' (it confesses plainly) 'then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain.' Facts such as these are not simply evidence of the truth of revelation, but the media of its impressiveness. The life of Christ brings together and concentrates truths concerning the chief good and the laws of our being, which wander idle and forlorn over the surface of the moral world, and often appear to diverge from one another. It collects the scattered rays of light, which, in the first days of creation, were poured over the whole face of nature, into certain intelligible centres, in the firmament of the heaven, to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from darkness.[1]

Thus vividly does Newman elaborate the great assurance, *In Thy Light shall we see Light.*

Thirdly, he deals with the difficult problem of conscience. His treatment of this in the *University Sermons* follows on his claim that natural religion is never the work of unaided

[1] ibid.

reason, since "The Creator has never left Himself without such witness as might anticipate the conclusions of Reason." [1]

He argues first that conscience "brings with it no proof of its truth, and commands attention to it on its own authority, all obedience to it is of the nature of Faith"; secondly, he urges "the uncertain character . . . of the inward law of right and wrong"; and thirdly, that "unformed and incomplete as is this law by nature, it is quite certain that obedience to it is attended by a continually growing expertness in the Science of Morals."

In Sermons xi, "The Nature of Faith in Relation to Reason," and xiii, "Implicit and Explicit Reason," Newman anticipated the problem which concerned him, so much later in his life, in *The Grammar of Assent.*

In the eleventh sermon he speaks of faith as "the reasoning of a divinely enlightened mind"; he also makes an unusual defence, but one which he always maintained, of the reasoning of the ordinary man, declaring that ordinary people "may argue badly, but they reason well; that is their professed grounds are no sufficient measures of their real ones;" a position which a thinker, as unlike him as J. S. Mill, once upheld in his *System of Logic*, and illustrated by the story of a man, untrained

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[1] ibid.

in legal niceties, who was being sent out as a judge to the Colonies, and was advised to promulge his decisions, but never to give his reasons. Newman adds: "In like manner, though the evidence with which Faith is content is apparently inadequate to its purpose, yet this is no proof of real weakness or imperfection in reasoning."

This line of argument will be made clearer by one more quotation from the eleventh sermon: "The experience of life contains abundant evidence that in practical matters, when their minds are really roused, men commonly are not bad reasoners. Men do not mistake when their interest is concerned. They have an instinctive sense in which direction their path lies towards it, and how they must act consistently with self-preservation or self-aggrandisement." He argues that this same quality is visible outside practical everyday life, viz. in the spheres of politics and religion. The point of importance here is that reason according to him works well when self-interest is also at work. Now self-interest is in the sphere of feeling, and therefore, though on an infinitely lower plane, this plea is akin to the mystic's that knowledge is not perfected save in an atmosphere of love.

Quite clearly in this sermon preached in 1839 Newman is groping after that which many years later he called the Illative Sense,

and which in *The Grammar of Assent* he set forth fully, so making his own personal contribution to philosophy.

He continued this subject in the thirteenth sermon, when he declared that "Reasoning . . . is a living spontaneous energy within us, not an Art," and is not to be confounded with that analysis of the process of reasoning which we call logic. After making the very useful suggestion about the difference with which any given "argument strikes the mind at one time and another, according to its particular state, or the accident of the moment," and declaring that "the recondite reasons which lead each person to take or decline them are just the most important portion of the considerations on which his conviction depends," he proceeds to propound that characteristic plea that "conviction for the most part follows not upon any one great or discursive proof or token of the point in debate, but upon a number of very minute circumstances together, which the mind is quite unable to count up and methodize in an argumentative form."

This sermon too leads on to *The Grammar of Assent*, whose main thought is, as Mr. Wilfrid Ward has written, that there are "grounds of conviction too personal to be adequately expressed." [1]

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[1] *Life of Cardinal Newman*, vol. ii, p. 244.

To be appreciated this book, which posterity will surely regard as his greatest work, must be read, and not once only. The single point which can be dealt with here is that of its core, the Illative Sense, for it is in dealing with that, his marked contribution to philosophy, that his fundamental mysticism appears.

"Certitude," he observes, "is a mental state; certainty is a quality of propositions."[1] As he remarks, "We are in a world of facts, and we use them, for there is nothing else to use." Certitude itself is a *fact.* However sceptical a man may be, he surely would not contend that he had never been in a state of certitude, for in that very statement he would convict himself, as he also would if he asserted that he did not know whether he had been or not. Every one of us must be certain of something, even were it of so dolorous a state as universal doubt.

The question which confronted Newman and confronts all of us is, What is the power, beyond and outside arguments and reasoning, which, in the human sciences, though not in mathematics where proof is demonstrable, is responsible for the *state* of certitude? Newman replies that it is the *Illative Sense*, and in trying to make clear its nature and function he claims that on the intellectual side of our life

[1] *The Grammar of Assent*, p. 344.

this sense is precisely parallel to *judgement* (Aristotle's φρόνησις) in conduct, or to *taste* in art. Raised to and operative in the religious sphere, this Illative Sense would be the mystic's direct knowledge, "the flight of the alone to the Alone."

It is Newman's great distinction that he was fundamentally a mystic: his outlook on life was in one piece; his standpoint was mystical throughout, from his treatment of the practical average man's "natural" right reasoning, through all the ramifications of human development, till he rose to the vision of God, and his—

> soul became as purest glass
> Through which the Brightness Incarnate
> In undimmed majesty might pass
> Transparent and illuminate.

When Newman left the English Church in 1845 one of his friends, James Mozley, wrote in *The Christian Remembrancer* words which are not only applicable in any time of fundamental disruption, but which also testified to the truly mystical spirit at work in the Tractarian Movement. This, perhaps the most poignant of Tractarian documents, remains to wring the hearts of those who, being neither fierce sectaries nor casual indifferentists, know the intolerable pain of that division which issues from a steadfast adherence to abstract truth seen thus by one, otherwise by another, which

both alike admit to be severally obligatory: "Let nobody complain: a time must come, sooner or later, in every one's life, when he has to part with advantages, connections, supports, consolations that he has had hitherto, and face a new state of things. Every one knows that he is not always to have all that he has now. He says to himself, 'What shall I do when this or that stay or connection is gone?' and the answer is, 'That he will do without it.' . . . The time comes when this is taken away, and then the mind is left alone, and is thrown back upon itself as the expression is. But no religious mind tolerates the notion of being really thrown upon itself; this is only to say in other words, that it is thrown back upon God." In the solemn fall of these simple words is enshrined the essence of that Detachment which is every mystic's necessary achievement.

If this absolute detachment were most signally shown by one of the Tractarians, surely that one was Isaac Williams. The tie between him and Newman could not be broken; yet of all Newman's friends, Williams was the most unshaken during the difficult years of "the 'forties," and the most unyielding, then and after, in his defence of the English Church. He was never for a moment carried off his feet by his love for Newman. As he wrote in his *Autobiography*: "Nothing had as yet

impaired my friendship with Newman. We lived daily very much together; but I had a secret uneasiness, not from anything said or implied, but from a want of repose about his character, that I thought he would start into some line different from Keble and Pusey, though I knew not in what direction it might be." [1]

He would not diverge one iota from his convictions, under the influence of any human affection, as he rather felt and feared Keble might: "I do not mean to say that there was ever any real difference of opinion between John Keble and myself, it was only when Newman and others were in their transition state, and before they left, John Keble, for love's sake, held with them; and I wished always to show that it was himself, his own former self, that was to be trusted, and that these notions did not belong to him. And as soon as they had left us it was otherwise. 'Now that I have thrown off Newman's yoke,' said he one day to me, 'these things appear to me quite different.'"

No one can fancy that this staunchness of purpose issued from hardness, or from any slightest diminution of affection, when he remembers Newman's letter of March, 1865, to Williams: "I don't forget, but remember

[1] *Autobiography*: Isaac Williams, p. 101. (Longmans.)

with much gratitude how for twenty years you are perhaps the only one of my old friends who has never lost sight of me—but by letters, or messages, or inquiries have ever kept up the memory of past and happy days. How mysterious it is that the holiest ties are swept and cast to the winds by the holiest promptings —and that they who would fain live together in a covenant of gospel peace, hear each of them a voice, and a contrary voice, calling on them to break it." [1]

Surely, if anything could be, this letter is a testimony to the fact that these two men, resolutely set on finding and keeping the truth, were absolutely obedient to that inner mystical light which gives a surer conviction than any dialectics. After Williams' death, Newman's letter to Sir George Prevost bears witness not only to the indestructible love which bound these two Tractarian leaders together, but to the former's wonderful detachment : " I have been planning another visit to dear Isaac, and your letter comes. My first sad thought is that in a certain sense I have killed him. I am sure so it is, that he did not rally after driving me down to the station. He has really been a victim of his old love for me. He has never lost sight—ever inquiring about me from others, sending messages or writing

[1] ibid., p. 134.

to me. . . . Well, I have sent him out of a world in which he had no part, except so far as it contained souls, with whom he was so lovingly bound up. . . . I shall say Mass (if all is well) on Saturday for his dear soul; and so will Mr. St. John. May God wash it white in His most precious blood, and receive it into that eternal peace and light which it coveted above all things." [1]

If in all these extracts there be nothing of the mystic's usual phraseology, they are instinct with its temper and outlook: the love of God above all things, the love of souls, utter detachment, self-stripping, scorn of material consequences. All these forged an unbreakable link between the men of the Tractarian Movement, which even the miseries of controversy were powerless to weaken or undo. Writing of Oxford Tractarianism, Dean Church said: "Its leaders were men well known in the University, in the first rank in point of ability and character; men of learning who knew what they were talking about; men of religious and pure, if also of severe lives. They were not men merely of speculation and criticism, but men ready to forgo anything, to devote everything for the practical work of elevating religious thought and life." [2]

[1] pp. 134–6.

[2] R. W. Church, *The Oxford Movement*, p. 212.

The great mystical classics of England lay forgotten, unnoticed ; only very recently have some of them been exhumed. Generation had passed after generation, and too often controversy had consumed the energy and hours which devotion might have used. But at any rate the spirit of the mystics was alive again in the Tractarians : their single-minded courage, their entire absorption in holy things, their penetrating vision, their love, all mark them off from that great mass of mankind who, in every era, rise no higher, even if they achieve that much, than a conventional acceptance of a creed and practice handed to them, whose underlying, vital, burning realities have never dawned upon them, to whose call they are deaf, whose content is unperceived, undreamed, it is hardly too much to say, undesired. It was to bring back the individuals composing that great mass that Keble toiled, as he wrote in that apostrophe to his lonely study's lamp :—

> There was a time, my friendly Lamp,
> When, far and wide, in Jesus' camp,
> Oft as the foe dark inroads made,
> They watched and fasted, wept and prayed ;
> But now, they feast and slumber on,
> And say, "Why pine o'er evil done ?"
>
> The Hours of Prayer, in welcome round,
> Far-severed hearts together bound :
> Seven times a day, *on bended knee*,
> They to their Saviour cried ; and we—

One hour we find in seven long days,
Before our God to *sit* and *gaze!* [1]

In his sermon on "Iniquity Abounding" Keble said: "If there be any one temper of mind which suits better than others with so awful a situation as Christians are now placed in, it is the temper of perfect resignation and singleness of purpose, a constant inward appeal, as it were, from a bad and seducing world to a good God, Who cannot flatter or deceive us. These dispositions will carry us through all our duties whether public or private, with the least possible countenance to the prevailing degeneracy, and with as much real, inward satisfaction as can prudently be looked for in the present state of things." [2]

It is no doubt a far cry from a remote little Yorkshire village in the fourteenth century to academic Oxford of 1823; but, for all that, Richard Rolle would have no difficulty in recognizing across the ages a brother-soul in John Keble. Of late years it has been urged against the Tractarians that they cared too little for ritual and ceremonial. In so far as that is true, it may have been partly the result of circumstances. When a surplice in the pulpit was the signal for a riot who can say what would have happened over a chasuble at the altar? But it is arguable that the

[1] *Lyra Apostolica*, lxiv.
[2] *Academical Sermons*. Original Edition, pp. 103–4.

alleged fact, so far as it is one, was the outcome of their truly mystical character, which, piercing the surface, penetrated to the underlying reality ; and this so naturally that in their concentration upon, and absorption in sound doctrine they underrated the ordinary man's ability to see and appreciate it, in the total absence of that ritual and ceremonial which are its outward garment, and which often are the original, though not the final, attraction to a so-far untaught heart and mind.

This natural affinity for the inside reality, which is really the essence of the mystical temper, appears incessantly. In the birthday sermon of the Movement, Keble's on *National Apostasy*, after pleading the appositeness of Old Testament teaching and warning to us of the Christian Dispensation, he said : "As regards reward and punishment, God dealt formerly with the Jewish people in a manner analogous to that in which He deals now, not so much with Christian nations as with the souls of individual Christians. . . . Rewards and punishments may be dispensed, visibly at least, with a less even hand ; but what tempers and what conduct God will ultimately reward and punish, this is a point which cannot be changed ; for it depends not on our circumstances, but on His essential, unvarying Attributes." [1]

[1] ibid., p. 130.

The inner temper and attitude of men, that was for Keble *la vraie vérité*, and it did not matter if the owner of it were a king of ancient Israel, or a member of the British Government of 1833, whose attitude to the English Church was a matter of such grave anxiety to that small band of Oxford divines on whose eyes the great vision of restoring the kingdom had opened. In the same sermon Keble said insistently: "I do not now speak of public measures only or chiefly. . . . But I speak of the spirit." [1] When he dealt with the possibility that the national Government might trample the Apostolical Church underfoot, and inquired what then would be the duty of her faithful children, his answer is one which none but a mystic would put just so: "The Church would, first of all, have to be constant, as before, in INTERCESSION. . . . That duty once well and cordially performed, all other duties, so to speak, are secured. Candour, respectfulness, guarded language—all that the Apostle meant in warning men not to 'speak evil of dignities'—may then, and then only, be practised, without compromise of truth and fortitude, when the habit is attained of praying as we ought for the very enemies of our precious and holy cause.

"The constant sense of God's presence and

[1] p. 137.

consequent certainty of final success, which can be kept up no other way, would also prove an effectual bar against the more silent, but hardly less malevolent, feeling of disgust, almost amounting to misanthropy, which is apt to lay hold on sensitive minds, when they see oppression and wrong triumphant on a large scale."

In this passage there is not only evidence of a disciplined, purged, illumined heart set irrevocably on realizing a far-off vision, but there is that most apt and necessary warning to all who take any reform in hand not to ruin their own souls by the untempered fierceness with which they fight for a cause, most just, most necessary, but only to be won effectually by those who fight in a spirit of self-discipline, with a calm temper and a heart undefiled by personal hatred.

When Keble passes on to the second duty of the Church's children in times of attack and persecution, the performance of it, he insists, must be marked by similar chastened confidence and calm : " Remonstrance calm, distinct, and persevering, in public and in private, direct and indirect, by word, look, and demeanour, is the unequivocal duty of every Christian, according to his opportunities when the Church landmarks are being broken down." [1]

It has been said that " The equable tempera-

[1] ibid., p. 144.

ment is seldom bestowed on those who have to fight for a great object against great odds." [1] That is very likely true. But Keble and the other early Tractarians perceived that great battles can only be rightly won by those who, whatever their natural temperament, have learned the lessons of self-purgation, self-control, self-surrender. To that surely is due the security of their work.

It will be remembered that Dean Church deprecated the publication of two of the *Tracts for the Times*, writing: "Two other essays appeared in the Tracts, most innocent in themselves, which ten or twenty years later would have been judged simply on their merits, but which at the time became potent weapons against Tractarianism. They were the productions of two poets, of two of the most beautiful and religious minds of their time; but at this stage of the movement it is hardly too much to say that they were out of place. . . . The first of these inopportune Tracts was an elaborate essay, by Mr. Keble, on the 'Mysticism of the Fathers in the use and interpretation of Scripture.' . . . The other, to the astonishment of every one, was like the explosion of a mine. . . . It was called 'On Reserve in communicating Religious Knowledge.' . . . The Tract was

[1] Miss E. K. Sanders, *Angélique of Port Royal.*

in many ways a beautiful and suggestive essay, full of deep and original thoughts, though composed in that spirit of the recluse which was characteristic of the writer, and which is in strong contrast with the energetic temper of to-day. But it could well have been spared at the moment, and it certainly offered itself to an unfortunate use. The suspiciousness which so innocently it helped to awaken and confirm was never again allayed." [1]

If it be trite to suggest that in every great controversy the actual combatants must fail to gauge the precisely relative significance of moments in the contest, it may perhaps be said that both of these "inopportune" Tracts were addressed *ad Clerum*, but fell also into the hands of some people who then, as others do now, regarded theology as one of the subjects on which every one, however untrained and uninformed, is competent to pronounce judgement.

Without this particular Tract, *On Reserve*, those who came after, those who were to rebuild on Tractarian foundations, would have had far less insight into the author's mysticism. It escapes throughout the Tract, even though, as I have said, the usual phraseology of the mystics is nowhere obtrusive. "I would say," he writes, "that there appears in God's

[1] R. W. Church, *The Oxford Movement*, pp. 229–30.

manifestations of Himself to mankind, in conjunction with an exceeding desire to communicate that knowledge, a tendency to conceal and throw a veil over it, as if it were injurious to us, unless we were of a certain disposition to receive it." Again he says: "In the Old Testament itself, are there not passages that refer to this reserve of wisdom? What is the meaning of that expression (in Proverbs xxv. 2): 'It is the glory of God to conceal a matter'? Does it not allude to this?"

Still more clearly mystical passages follow when he indicates the necessity of a cleansed and loving heart before illumination can come: "As He is revealed to us as more than willing to forgive, but as it were unable to do so unless we repent, in like manner He is also as desirous to manifest Himself to us, but, as it were, unable to do so unless we are fitly disposed for it." And once more, "What is much to be observed with regard to those expressions of our Lord is that the not understanding of them was considered as matter of reproof, as implying something morally deficient, not intellectually." The same line of thought occurs in his Commentary on the Apocalypse, where, in section ii, chapter v, he deals with the "sealed books."

The second part of the Tract is more definitely mystical than the first. After point-

ing out that pre-Christian moralists "speak of a state of probation as being one of increasing moral light or of increasing darkness," and that in Aristotle's view "the whole of improvement . . . seems to be an increase in knowledge; and a preparation of the heart to a discernment ever clearer and more clear of the highest wisdom; and a cordial embracing of and resting in the contemplation of truths which are at length disclosed to it. For he not only considers goodness to lead to, and consist in, improved moral and practical discernment (*φρόνησις*), but this discernment as subservient to the attainment of some higher wisdom (*σοφία*)," Isaac Williams goes on to remark that "Scripture speaks of this Divine knowledge as, in some especial manner, the gift of God. . . . Those pre-eminent saints of God, Abraham, S. John, S. Paul, seem to stand out, as it were, from the human race by a kind of solitude of spirit, from their minds appearing to be conversant with things above human nature. Abraham, of whom it is said, on account of his obedience, 'Shall I hide from Abraham the thing which I do?' S. Paul, who saw things that it was not lawful for man to utter; and S. John, whose character is not more strongly marked for that divine love for which he is known than for what may be termed, very inadequately, heavenly contemplation."

He tries to describe the nature of this knowledge: "This knowledge is always spoken of as something so vast, and, as I said, infinite, that persons seem never to be addressed as if they had attained, but rather to be urged on to the greater attainment; it does not seem to be spoken of in terms such as Peace and even Faith, but more like Divine Charity, and, perhaps, as co-existent and co-extensive with it, as a part only at best of what is boundless, and will be more fully developed hereafter."

One more quotation from this Tract must suffice: "The next point to be observed is, that this hidden wisdom is entirely of a moral nature, and independent of any mere cultivation of the intellect. . . . S. John often mentions this knowledge in connection with love, and such love as the result of obedience. And experience thus confirms it: actions of self-denial dispose the heart to prayer, prayer to the love of God, and the love of God to the knowledge of Him. . . .

"Moreover, it is to such as Daniel, 'the man of loves,' which are divine and not earthly, that revelations are made."

It may be noted that he had the true mystic's fear of false mysticism, of being misled, a point on which Père Poulain enlarges in his great book on mysticism, *Des Grâces d'Oraison*. Isaac Williams' sonnet on

Origen is sufficient proof that in the region of mysticism he still kept that steady, balanced mood which neither underrates nor overrates the component parts of a situation :—

> Into God's Word, as in a palace fair,
> Thou leadest on and on, while still beyond
> Each chamber, touched by holy wisdom's wand,
> Another opes, more beautiful and rare ;
> And thou in each art kneeling down in prayer,
> From link to link of that mysterious bond
> Seeking for Christ ; but oh, I fear thy fond
> And beautiful torch, that with so bright a glare
> Lighteth up all things, lest the heaven-lit brand
> Of thy serene Philosophy divine
> Should take the colourings of earthly thought,
> And I, by their sweet images o'erwrought,
> Led by weak Fancy should let go Truth's hand
> And miss the way into the inner shrine.[1]

There can be no doubt in the mind of any one acquainted with the mystics that Isaac Williams was of their company. Dean Church's estimate of him as he appeared to the public, in spite of his character which justified the very opposite of this popular view, is no bad evidence of the blinding effect of a controversial spirit : "Isaac Williams, if any man, represented in the Movement the moderate and unobtrusive way of religious teaching. But it was his curious fate to be dragged into the front ranks of the

[1] *Lyra Apostolica*, xciii.

fray and to be singled out as almost the most wicked and dangerous of the Tractarians." [1]

Possibly the Tract *On Reserve* stirred up more horrified opposition than the other "inopportune" one, because it was latently mystical, whereas Keble dealt openly and boldly with mysticism, defending it against those attacks which were the seed-plot of that which we know as Modernism. Keble saw as clearly as Newman did many years later, when he urged the reality of the Illative Sense, that human beings, as at present constituted, cannot reach conviction in the human, as contrasted with the positive sciences, unless they are endowed with some capacity for *direct, immediate* apprehension: "Whitby lays it down as an axiom, That if Scripture be a perfect rule of faith, it must be so clear in necessary things as to require no interpreter; and that it cannot be a rule or measure where it is obscure. Might he not as reasonably have said, that it cannot be a rule to any one who does not thoroughly understand the languages in which it was originally written? Such sentiments are, in fact, inconsistent with the present condition of man: they deal with us as if we might be independent of human testimony, or arrive at mathematical certainty in moral matters." [2]

[1] *The Oxford Movement*, p. 67.

[2] *Tracts for the Times*, No. 89, p. 11. Second edition.

It may be objected that in this Tract Keble never uses the word mysticism in its more ordinary sense (as, to put it shortly, in a well-known phrase, "the flight of the alone to the Alone"), in the sense of purgation, illumination, and union, but always in that of allegory and symbolism. Yet, while so restricting himself, he is all the time aiming at true illumination and union: at the end of the Tract it becomes obvious that the whole of the natural world is viewed by him as the veil, the outer shell, so to speak, of the supernatural: "We are naturally carried on to say to ourselves, 'What if the whole scheme of sensible things be figurative? What if all *αἰσθητὰ*' (perceptions) 'answer to *νοητα*' (conceptions) 'in the same kind of way as these which are expressly set down? What if these are but a slight specimen of one great use which Almighty God would have us make of the external world, and of its relation to the world spiritual?' Certainly the form itself of speaking, with which these symbols are introduced, would seem to imply some such general rule; 'That was the True Light'; 'I am the True Vine'; 'Who will give you the True riches,' taking for granted, in a manner the fact, that there was somewhere in the nature of things a true counterpart of these ordinary objects—a substance, of which they were but unreal shadows—and only informing

us in each case, with authority, what that counterpart and substance was." [1]

This passage, with an earlier one where he writes of the primitive fathers' "mode of treating natural objects, and the truths of philosophy and common life, fancying everywhere indications of that system [2] on which their own hearts were set," [3] shows, should any need external proof, that Keble's poetry was no mere following of the Wordsworthian school, but was the outcome of his own inner nature, mystical as that was—seeing a sacrament in the commonest happening, perceiving the material but apprehending the supernatural—and also the outcome of his conviction that in the divine plan the outer world is intimately related to the inner, so suiting such a creature as man, whose soul, here and now, is housed in poor "Brother Ass," the material body :—

> Needs no show of mountain hoary,
> Winding shore or deepening glen,
> Where the landscape in its glory
> Teaches truth to wandering men :
> Give true hearts but earth and sky,
> And some flowers to bloom and die,
> Homely scenes and simple views
> Lowly thoughts may best infuse. [4]

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[1] Tract 89, p. 165. Second edition.
[2] i.e. mysticism. [3] Tract 89, p. 6.
[4] *The Christian Year :* First Sunday after Epiphany.

Yet responsive as Keble was to the sacramental aspects of nature, he knew that the beauty of this physical world could be no more than the mystic's portal, realizing that the mystic way to union must be paved with abhorrence of sin and purgation—

> who to that bliss aspire
> Must win their way through blood and fire.
> The writhings of a wounded heart
> Are fiercer than a foeman's dart,[1]

and surrounded by an atmosphere of love :—

> O Thou, Who keep'st the Key of Love,
> Open Thy fount, eternal Dove,
> And overflow this heart of mine,
> Enlarging as it fills with Thee,
> Till in one blaze of charity
> Care and remorse are lost, like motes in light divine;
>
> Till as each moment wafts us higher,
> By every gush of pure desire,
> And high-breath'd hope of joys above,
> By every secret sigh we heave,
> Whole years of folly we outlive,
> In His unerring sight, Who measures Life by Love.[2]

The stern element in mysticism, the sense of sin which makes a man "abhor himself," the need for mortification, for purgation, these are all to be found most strongly emphasized, among the men of the Tractarian Movement, by Newman and Pusey. No

[1] ibid., Wednesday before Easter.
[2] ibid., First Sunday after Christmas.

one who has meditated on Newman's sermon on "The Mental Sufferings of our Lord in His Passion" can doubt his conviction of the utter ruinousness of sin. Of all the many books which Dr. Pusey wrote the most mystical perhaps is his *Eleven Addresses*. These were delivered during a Retreat of the Companions of the Love of Jesus, an Order whose work was the offering of perpetual intercession for the conversion of sinners.

The very conception of such an Order is a testimony to the dreadful horror of sin: some of the addresses, notably the fourth, *Love of God and of Jesus, God-Man, for each soul in the Passion*; the fifth, *Love of God and of Jesus for each soul: some special sufferings in the Passion*; and particularly the eighth, *Horribleness of Sin*, are saturated with that sense of sin as an unbearable outrage on God which is so prominent in earlier English Mystics.

It is useless to attempt to give an idea of them by quotations; but there is a passage which can be taken from one of the later addresses, the ninth, to show how great was Pusey's mystical sense, an influence most potent in the Movement, whose force, because its principal leaders were so inspired, is still unspent: "Another difficulty, I think, comes to some of us, as if some great effort was necessary to reach God. They think of God

as far away, in the Highest Heavens, in some place where Jesus is, high above all Heavens, and so they go up and up in their thoughts and they send up their prayers, and they can scarcely believe that such prayers as their's can go up on high. God seems to them as One Who had 'covered Himself with a cloud that our prayer should not pass through.' And yet prayer has no strain, least of all, of imagination. We pray in the midst of God. For 'in Him we live and move and are.' His Ear is ever near us. It is at our heart. The lowest whisper reaches it. It is open to the faintest velleity of the soul."

Though Pusey dwelt with so great emphasis on the necessity for purgation, the same doctrine is, of course, to be found, in greater or less degree, in all Tractarian teaching; e.g. with something of Father Maturin's relentless analysis of the "desperately wicked" human heart, in Dr. Neale's exhortation to candidates for confirmation: "Let your battle be like that of which the Prophet speaks. Set yourselves like a flint for this; that sin—the very least sin—shall not have dominion over you. Set yourselves for this; that Satan indeed may tempt and you may feel; may speak and you must hear; but the very feeling shall be one of abhorrence, but the hearing shall be only that poor outward hearing which is inseparable from us in the flesh. Set your

full resolution against that troublesome *self* which in each of you is so often pleading for that indulgence or that concession ; which begs so earnestly to have its own way just in this, or just in that ; which in escaping from the great city of Sodom, is ready to find, or to make, so many little Zoars everywhere." [1]

Miss Towle, in her *Life of Dr. Neale*, observes that "His knowledge either of the systematic and tabulated mysticism of S. Teresa, or of such morbid quietism as that of Madame de Guyon, was not experimental ; though his imagination, unfettered by chilling prejudices or rationalistic disposition, easily lifted him into a region where supernatural occurrences or heavenly visions were natural indications of the Divine Presence." [2]

It is extremely difficult to interpret this passage, since the two halves of it seem to contradict each other, and the introduction of the word imagination still further confuses the issue, as mysticism is not imagination's fruit ; it is impossible even to guess what the reference to S. Teresa may mean, for any one less "tabulated" it would be hard to find.

Though the Tractarians were more latently

[1] J. M. Neale, D.D., *Occasional Sermons*, No. ix.

[2] Eleanor A. Towle, *Life of John Mason Neale, D.D.*, p. 292.

mystical than, say, the men and women of the fourteenth or seventeenth centuries, yet they knew what illumination is, and their lives were spent in the attempt to reach union, to get beyond the moment when the only possible utterance is, "Truly Thou art a God that hidest Thyself."

Perhaps the reason for this condition is to be found in the loss, so far as England is concerned, of contact with pre-Reformation mystics, whether our own or those of other countries, and in the failure to keep in touch even with post-Reformation mystics; so that though, in the mercy of God, the mystical temperament was not extinguished in England, there was no full recognition of mysticism as an essential element in religion, even by those who were themselves potential or actual mystics.

To those who have gathered the later fruit which ripened through the toil of the great Tractarians, some of the passages quoted here may seem ordinary and familiar enough, almost truisms indeed. But they were startling, alarming novelties to the complacence of the 'forties and 'fifties of the last century; they seemed revolutionary, disastrous, calculated to wreck the whole existing order to those Oxford authorities whom Dean Church castigated so severely in the sixteenth chapter of *The Oxford Movement*; for indeed "the

mystical element in religion" will always alarm the conventionalists.

By the courtesy of Lord Acton, part of a letter which Dean Church wrote to him explaining his precise purpose in leaving a record of the stormiest years of the Oxford Movement was printed in the Advertisement when the book was posthumously published in 1891. He thus summed up the Tractarians: "For their time and opportunities, the men of the Movement, with all their imperfect equipment and their mistakes, still seem to me the salt of their generation. . . . I wish to leave behind me a record that one who lived with them, and lived long beyond most of them, believed in the reality of their goodness and height of character, and still looks back with deepest reverence to those forgotten men as the companions to whose teaching and example he owes an infinite debt, and not he only, but religious society in England of all kinds."

Is it too much to say that in the sphere of religion, wherever there is salt, there mysticism will not be wholly lacking?

Reference has been made in a previous chapter to Baron Friedrich von Hügel's plea that religion, when it is entirely sound, is and must be a synthesis of the institutional, the intellectual, and the mystical.

As is well known, the Oxford Movement

was launched at a moment when the real life of the English Church had ebbed away to a disastrously low level. With everything against it—the power of an established system, of position, of wealth, the natural prejudices of a nation which had largely ceased to understand the Catholic Church's tradition and doctrine —still the Movement grew ; and those who have inherited its gains are, it is to be hoped, ready in their turn to labour in the work of recovery and to prepare for fresh spiritual adventures.

May it not be the fact that so clear a victory against so great odds was due to the fact that these men, led by the Spirit of God, combined in a wonderful way intellect, regard for tradition, institutionalism with a mysticism which had too long suffered eclipse in the English Church ? There had been abundant intellect in the men of the eighteenth century, but Dr. Gore reminds us that "a man like Bishop Butler could say of a man like George Whitefield, 'Sir, the pretending to extraordinary revelation and gifts of the Holy Ghost is a horrid thing, a very horrid thing.'"[1] Such a state of affairs became possible when mysticism had fallen out of the recollection, let alone the heart and practice, of excellent men.

[1] Charles Gore, D.D., *The New Theology and the Old Religion*, p. 261.

At the same time it is necessary to admit the truth, which history has more than once proved, that unbridled, undisciplined mysticism may easily degenerate into heresy. Yet without mysticism religion becomes empty, dry, starved.

Before the stream of published books had become a roaring torrent it was an easier task to pick out the mystical writers in any given century. Probably in every age scores live and die unacclaimed publicly, and, in private, barely recognized as mystics by those nearest to them. Of those whose way of life was known, because perhaps they set pen to paper or revealed themselves by some other equally obvious activity, it was easier to be aware. And in earlier times there were fewer people and everything was on a smaller scale than in the later years of the nineteenth century, when all human material enterprise grew enormously, and, in particular, publications swelled in volume if not always in proportional value.

Even so, it could be seen by the discerning that there were some who, if they did not live conspicuously apart like Rolle or Dame Gertrude, or inspire a great movement like the Tractarians, still showed in their writings and in their lives what Baron von Hügel taught us to call mystical elements. Names slip into memory of those who, were diligent search made in their books, could be shown to possess,

more or less, such elements. Among the poets were Browning, Patmore, Francis Thompson, Lionel Johnson, perhaps; among the theologians, Bishop Ullathorne, Fathers Richard Meux Benson, Basil Maturin, Joseph Rickaby, George Congreve, Mgr. Robert Hugh Benson, and Dr. Illingworth.

Only a mystic could have written *Christian Patience*; to realize this let the reader turn to Dr. Ullathorne's chapter on *Patience as the Discipline of the Soul*, the chapter which opens with these words: "We have come to the great problem of our moral nature, What is it to hold our soul in our own possession?"

The word may not actually occur in the book, but, for all that, Father Basil Maturin's *Self-Knowledge and Self-Discipline* is one of the most searching books in the English language on Purgation; it has the unflinching directness, if it lacks the quaintness, of the fourteenth century. Let a reader ponder on the subtle, relentless penetration of the chapter on the "Discipline of the Mind," with its insistence without over-insistence on the function in his spiritual life of the intellectual side of man. The close interconnection of the parts in our complex human nature is so simply and lucidly put, without the professional psychologist's barbarous technicalities, as for instance in this sentence: "It is a terrible thing to let the heart live its own life separate from the intel-

lect. To know what is true and to love what is false. To feed the mind upon one thing and the heart upon another."[1] Or has any one shown more plainly the end and aim of purgation than here?—"For the value of mortification is as a means to an end, it is the end that interprets and sanctifies the means. And the end is not death but life. It is not the act of mortification in itself, nor the pain that it costs which gives it its value, but what it gains. It is not the mere giving up but the receiving. . . . So S. Paul says of our Lord: 'For the joy that was set before Him He endured the Cross.' In the darkness He saw the light and reached towards it."[2]

Of Robert Hugh Benson's voluminous writings, two, and those not the volumes of short stories of supernatural events, show his vein of mysticism. One was put together while he was still an Anglican, *The Little Book of the Love of Jesus*, in which he tried so hard to show his countrymen something of the mystical devotion of their forefathers, and, if it might be, to win them to the like spirit.

The other reveals his own inner self: a small book it is which sometimes seems, so far as the general reader is concerned, to have been washed into oblivion by the spate of his novels, but which is the most beautiful book

[1] B. W. Maturin, *Self-Knowledge and Self-Discipline*.
[2] ibid., p. 263.

he ever published, *The Friendship of Christ.* He prefaced it by a little statement, *This is my Friend*, to which he appended the foot-note, "From an old Manuscript." One ventures to doubt if that manuscript were older than himself. It is the utterance of a mystic, and the book works out its theme.

The Society of S. John the Evangelist, Cowley, must well have known that their Founder was a mystic ; and there were doubtless, beyond the Society's borders, many who knew it. The most fortunate publication of his *Letters*, specially, but by no means exclusively, of those to Father O'Neill, have shown a much larger world still that the Anglican Church now, with all its contradictions and difficulties, can not only nurture but to the end keep a mystic.

In Father Benson's first volume of *Letters* there is only one direct reference to mysticism,[1] where, writing to a South African missionary, he comments ironically on those people who can study mysticism just because they look upon it as a thing of the past, though "no one would think of attempting to live as people lived who had those fanatical ideas!"

To Father O'Neill he wrote once on this subject : "We are so apt to treat earnestness of purpose and orthodoxy of conception as if

[1] *Letters of Richard Meux Benson*, p. 326.

they constituted the two essentials of the Christian character. But really neither of them is of any good unless these two become one, i.e. unless the dogmatic statements germinate as the very seeds of the mystical life, so that all earnestness of purpose comes from the supernatural powers in which we believe." [1]

Direct references to mysticism are few in these letters, perhaps because Father Benson was living not studying the mystical life ; yet scattered all through them are thoughts and statements which only a mystic would utter. For example, he writes, again to Father O'Neill : "To us upward means inward : for the higher world is that glorified existence of the Great Mediator Who stands to us in the relation, not of an apex to a triangle, but of a central point of power to the solid sphere which feels its motions, Himself 'unmoved, all motion's Source'—by creative power in the outer world, by mediatorial grace in the sphere of supernatural life. People have so little notion of the real Presence of Christ within them as the basis of all sanctity." [2]

There is another, in the years following the Tractarians, a man of failure the world must deem him, whom I put last and dwell upon briefly here, because, first, he was one in

[1] *Further Letters of Richard Meux Benson*, p. 248.
[2] *Letters of Richard Meux Benson*, p. 156.

whose nature mysticism was more than a strong strand, being something more like the woof of him—George Tyrrell. It is at least conceivable that among these later men of whom the world at large knows something he was intrinsically, however much circumstances deflected his natural bent, as mystical as any man of our generation. Secondly, I think he should have some small place in a book on English Mystics because the world, if it still remember him, too much thinks of him under another and unhappier guise ; and, last of all, because, so far as I know, though he has been abundantly written about by not a few, no one, on either side of his family, has attempted to add anything of just that contribution which it is only possible for one of his own stock to give.

To include him is not to stretch this book's title to cracking-point ; for the Tyrrells, originally Norman, settled both in England and Ireland, and George's grandfather moved from Oxfordshire to Ireland ; while his mother's ancestor, John Chamney of Shillelagh, was an English settler in Ireland in Charles II's reign. So he was, like most people in these islands, racially a mixture.

He was equally complex in character. If it be true that mysticism was the woof of his nature, it was woven on to a warp which was hardly sympathetic in all respects to that

temperament, nor even homogeneous in itself; made up as it was of ingenuousness and secretiveness, sagacity and indiscretion, a longing for peace and security with a total inability to avoid a fight, the whole of these antitheses being shot through with a vivid, sudden, disconcerting, and sometimes devastating wit. Probably this last was the source of most of his troubles; yet could his superiors but have known it, it was no special iniquity of his own, but a gift shared by many of his family. More than one of his cousins could have written that page in his *Autobiography* about his advancement at the age of two or three "to the dignity of linen drawers, belaced at the edges," and his indecorous drawing of attention to this fact, "which so shocked a bystanding maiden lady."[1]

From the beginning to the end of his life this hereditary gift was for ever landing him in disasters, small or great, because the majority of people fail so hopelessly to distinguish a shield against fortune from a "cloke of maliciousness." Thus, in 1903, before his worst distresses began, but when his path was by no means smooth, he wrote to a correspondent: "The death of my friend Leo and the accession of Pius has damaged my prospects irretrievably. The ten days' interim, when

[1] *Autobiography and Life of George Tyrrell*, vol. i, p. 14. Edited and written by M. D. Petre.

there was no infallible authority on earth, were the happiest of my life ; I went through a perfect encyclopaedia of heresies, and am now suffering from an acute orthodox reaction in consequence." [1]

While some can see precisely how that was said, and what it meant, and appreciate the drollery of it, there are, unfortunately, scores who would be shocked even to the point of being grievously scandalized.

Then again, far more poignantly really, though with apparent lightheartedness, in the troublous year 1907 he wrote to Mr. Bailey Saunders : "I have been so *accablé* with affairs, getting excommunicated and the like, that I clean forgot to tell you that I am not going to London, and could not meet you on the 26th." [2]

It must be a stupid person who cannot realize that it is just a heart at breaking-point which relieves itself in that fashion because it can in no other, yet many do fail to realize it, wherefore perhaps Tyrrell and his like are as "stupid" in not realizing until too late that it is not well to say everything which comes into one's head in the possible hearing of everybody. There is one other fundamental trait in his character to be reckoned with if he is to be understood, again an in-

[1] *George Tyrrell's Letters*, p. 160. Edited by M. D. Petre.
[2] ibid., p. 52.

heritance, that quality which is called "keeping the heart of a child." In a delightful passage, when he has described the evenings which he and his sister spent with their mother, and her "stories, songs, and hymns of which she had a large répertoire," and after chuckling over his childish mistakes, with the assertion that "*Rocka Vages* has associations that 'Rock of Ages' can never have," he notes this same trait in his mother: "Even then our mother, who kept her child's heart and spirits to the bitter end, was our companion and playmate, not, I think, in that patronizing, condescending way I have often noticed in other parents, and which children are so quick to discern, but with a genuine sympathy and temporary reversion to the earlier *strata* of her own consciousness, being as interested and 'real' as ourselves for the moment. This power of sympathy — of becoming a little child—is surely the great and long-sought secret of education in every department. What we need is one greater, wiser, stronger than ourselves, who can also *become* little, and enter into us and then expand and raise and strengthen us; else what does the Incarnation mean?"[1] This retention of the *reality* of childhood, that tremendous power of caring for the very inside of things,

[1] *Autobiography*, p. 16.

marks all the mystics, though we may not "convert the proposition," and reckon as mystics all who have it.

Tyrrell had another not uncommon mark of them, viz. a sense in childhood of the nearness of the unseen, the unhandled, and of its substantiality when compared with the passing of the world of everyday life. The philosopher Berkeley had it; Cardinal Newman and Wordsworth are other well-known instances. Tyrrell had it, with a difference; for even here his natural quaintness, which seemed to some people like irreverence, entered. In his *Autobiography* he has kept a record of it in his account of his early theological images, and of a certain vision: "We had a moral picture-book (Aunt Oddamadodd—euphonically so it sounded to me) in which was portrayed a certain *Ugly Jane*, with her hair in a net, who was addicted to the evil habit of making grimaces before the glass; upon which a justly enraged heaven caught her *flagrante delicto*, in the act of putting out her tongue, and there fixed her for ever to the consequences of her wilful choice—surely an apt illustration of the irreparable and eternal consequences of mortal sin! Well—He alone knows why—but that young lady, dreeing her sad doom, served as my phantasm of God for years and years . . . for some reason or other I personified heaven as an old woman

after the image and likeness of Mrs. Meyer,[1] with a huge cap tied under her chin, and a red plaid shawl folded across her capacious bosom. One night I had a vision in which these personages figured, and my mother naturally listened with interest to the divine revelations accorded to innocents and denied to sages, till I came to describe the celestial Gamp as Mrs. Heaven, upon which my 'showings' were ignominiously relegated to the limbo of illusions and nightmares, and my heaven depersonalized into a place beyond the clouds, where 'poor papa' lived in conditions of unspeakable comfort."[2]

Through the grown man's amused recollection it is easy to see the child's visionary, personalizing bent.

This is even more obvious in his unusual comparison of the mysterious influences of sea and sky: "The sea has done more for my soul, in the cathartic line, than the stars. The heavens in their vastness and eternity are too inferential, too unreal and invisible, too intellectual to help me to rise above contingencies. It needs an act of faith in mathematics and science, and I am not good at acts of faith. But the sea's bigness and might and ruthless disregard of every human interest, coupled with its wonderful animation, and

[1] An aged schoolmistress, a terror to him in his infancy.

[2] *Autobiography*, p. 18.

expression and character would have made me a sea-worshipper, had I been in search of a God." [1]

Whatever men may think of other aspects of his life and faith, surely no one will deny that there was a large mystical element in Tyrrell. Brought up in his very early manhood in the strictest scholasticism, introduced when past middle age to the yeasty workings of the Kantian philosophy, led always to some extent, here more, there less, by that direct intuition which is the instrument of the mystical temperament, he was subjected to a disastrous conflict of opposites. It may well be held that Roman authority could do no other than it did, though, in the minds of a few, the question may lurk, Would Leo XIII, with his acute vision and wide sympathy, have managed just so? But if authority could, in fact, do no other, no one can reflect on its responsibilities otherwise than with sorrowful awe.

In his full manhood, Tyrrell's mystical tendency showed itself in various writings, whose value perhaps will be more fully seen when the Modernist movement has followed so many others into the limbo where forgetfulness obliterates passion; writings such as his introduction to an edition of Mother Julian's "Shewings," the chapters on mysticism in

[1] ibid., p. 26.

The Faith of the Millions, in *Hard Sayings*, with its tribute to S. Teresa, and in many penetrating thoughts and visions in *Nova et Vetera* and *Oil and Wine*. These, one ventures to think, may remain with some of his *Letters* and the *Autobiography* when *Christianity at the Cross Roads*, *Mediaevalism*, *Through Scylla and Charybdis* are no more than forlorn echoes of a struggle into which entered many blunders on more sides than one.

That he really was to be ranked among the mystics is suggested by a sentence in Baron von Hügel's first letter to him, seeking his acquaintance, when the greatest student of mysticism in our day wrote of "the furtherance and encouragement that I have so abundantly found in your *Nova et Vetera*, of ideas and tendencies that have now for long been part and parcel of my life, its aims and combats." [1]

The third chapter of Miss Petre's *Life of George Tyrrell* tells the story of the friendship of these two men, and gives some account of Tyrrell's introduction to modern philosophy. The thinker who had been steeped in S. Thomas was now, in mid life, to be plunged into the undermining philosophy of Kant, and into that of his successors. This busy man was induced by Baron von Hügel to embark on learning

[1] Quoted in *The Life of George Tyrrell*, by M. D. Petre, vol. ii, p. 85.

German, and we hear Tyrrell's half-irritable, half-amused cry of impatience, as with his usual vehemence he scatters before him so tiresome an obstacle as a mere unlearned tongue, "I have actually *begun* German; but oh! what a language! Hebrew seems a simple task in comparison."

Even more than in his writings Tyrrell's intrinsic mysticism appears in the whole tenour of his life. He *knew* there was Light beyond all the entanglements and obscurities and hindrances of this world; and of him it was most true *porro unum est necessarium*. He strove after that far-off Light with the persistence with which a sunflower follows the sun, but with a vehemence all his own. I possess his copy of *The Prayer Book Interleaved*, which at the age of eighteen he studied, as the underscorings and other markings indicate, with a close interest in all acutely controversial points. The inscription in it is "George Tyrrell, 1879," the very year in which so suddenly he was received into the Roman Catholic Church, an event which he himself describes thus: "Here was post-haste and no mistake; from start to goal, from post to finish, in twenty-four hours. I had come out that afternoon with no intention of being received, and I returned a Papist and half a Jesuit." [1]

[1] *Autobiography*, p. 162.

It is quite easy to judge such proceedings unbalanced; but it is as arguable that they issue from a temperament which cares for nothing but to find the ultimate, uttermost truth, and will do anything and make any sacrifice to win it; and, most clinching argument of all, will go on to the end, persisting in one sacrifice after another which may seem to lead to the goal, and this when failure and disappointment have followed previous sacrifices with a monotony and a magnitude which to most of us would be heartbreaking. Let no one make the mistake of fancying that Tyrrell was such a fighter that he cared nothing for blows. That hard temper was never his. His was hyper-sensitiveness, the terrible sensibility to every shade of pain which, when he was fifty, wrung from him that heart-piercing cry, "You do not know how it hurts," [1] which was written, in italics, to an Oxford friend, and referred to his deprivation of celebrating Mass.

In another letter, quoting Thomas à Kempis, he wrote, "*Nemo tam cordialiter senserit passionem Christi quam is cui contigerit pati similia*—at least we can get up our little ant-hill Calvaries, and make our sums of proportion better than before. It is a better route to the knowing of Christ than theology." [2]

[1] M. D. Petre, *Life of George Tyrrell*, vol. ii, p. 266.
[2] ibid., p. 264.

The passage in *A Perverted Devotion* where he says of fundamental doctrines of sin and punishment, "We are in the region of faith and mystery, and must await the answer to these riddles in patience and humility," breathes the true mystical spirit, and I quote this sentence from a controversial essay because it may suggest that Tyrrell was a deflected mystic. He cannot rank among the great ones, but passages like this of insight and devotion, and resignation and utter self-surrender, scattered up and down his writings—whether polemical or not—and his sermons and his letters, may support the plea which I have already urged, that controversy is the sworn foe of spirituality, and that however inevitable the controversy may be.

Had Tyrrell been placed in circumstances where his underlying spirituality could have had full scope, had he been left untroubled by doctrinal disputations, theological criticism, and heady German philosophy, then English Mystical Literature might conceivably have been enriched by some treatise not wholly unworthy to stand in the great line which begins with the name of Richard Rolle. To concentrate this possibility in a question—What might not have happened had he been a Benedictine instead of a Jesuit? Would the different environment have made just the difference in his particular case?

That he realized the fatal spiritual loss involved in living persistently in intellectual turmoil, in the dust and noise of theological arguments, is obvious from his counsel to another troubled soul: "I can only say to you, 'Wait and be silent.' Read William Law and the mystics, and put dogmatic problems out of your head."[1]

He was the very last person to try to escape a theological difficulty by refuging himself in any sloppy emotionalism; but he knew that none of us can endure to "live with perpetual burnings"; times come when all that side of religion must be, for the time, postponed, laid aside. "It remains a fact," he writes to one correspondent, "and a regrettable one, that the true doctrine of prayer is not more generally insisted on; that only those who explore the mystical writers, and not those taught by the ordinary manuals of religious piety, are helped to a deeper and more vital conception of its character."[2]

The reason for this he stated earlier in the same letter (of uncertain date): "Conscience is, in each of us, both private and particular and universal. . . . Thus the martyr of conscience is the martyr alike of a personal and universal command. So of prayer. In it we have another manifestation of this double

[1] *Letters of George Tyrrell*, p. 55. [2] ibid., p. 148.

law. We pray, but God prays in us. We pray to what is without, but to what is also within us. Thus the answer to prayer is in some matters and to some extent the product of prayer itself—prayer is always creative as well as impetrative." [1]

However abrupt they may sound in some ears, perhaps the words uttered one month before his death may testify to his intrinsic mysticism : " I am glad God is to judge me, and not any of His servants." [2]

The flame-lit thread of English Mysticism winds down through the centuries which separate Cynewulf from the men of to-day. Through all the changes, certain characteristics remain constant, while others, such as the method of the nature mystics, vanish, to reappear later.

Its most persistent traits are a very simple directness, absence of all elaboration, and in almost all, with the exception of the Tractarians, a marked quaintness, a wit ready to play over the gravest matters. The simplicity amounts often almost to plainness ; and while no one can accuse English Mystics of a lack of feeling, there is, in most of them, an avoidance of those tender modes of address which are so abundant and so natural in the Latin

[1] ibid., p. 148. [2] p. 361.

and Flemish Mystics. Far more striking, however, than this is the absence of raptures and ecstasies, of exhaled fragrances and perfumes which fill a considerable place in the experience of mystics of other races, careful as they generally are, and as orthodox writers on mysticism are, to insist that all these are really not of the essence of mysticism, while some forms of them have been condemned as diabolical temptations; and further, contests with the powers of evil, so real and vivid to some mystics that the combatants feel the actual presence of devils, play scarcely any part in the lives and practice and experience of English Mystics.

As we pass in memory through the sequent ages, the impression left by these saintly, elect English men and women is of people who, while giving themselves wholly to the vision of God and to those exercises and illuminations which helped them along the way, never quite lose their racial individualism as they live and think and act. Even before the great division in the sixteenth century, while all obedience was paid to Holy Church and her directions, none of them feared to wander off into some bypath offered to the seeking soul. Divisions and controversies have brought, among other evils, to some of us an undue shrinking from spiritual adventures, probably because others have been

tempted to cast down all boundaries and wander egregiously.

All the nations are destined in the end to "bring their glory" into the eternal city; among them ourselves—we plain, practical, unsystematic English people.

Once, as history shows, as I hope this book may partly serve to show, no small part of our "glory" was to be found among our mystics. They did not "study" mysticism, they lived in the pursuit of the Presence of God. When divisions came, it appears as if men blindly thought that safety lay in intellectual discussions and the preservation of a traditional system, forgetting that while these two are essential, they cannot have their full fruition without the third "element in religion," the inner, hidden, mystical life.

More and more in the last two centuries has this third element tended to pass out of English life; but the Tractarians and their successors, if they have produced no great work like Rolle, or Hilton, or Father Baker, or Traherne, at least practised in their lives the self-purgation which is the first requisite; have received illumination, and have come closer and closer to the God Who hides Himself.

The English Church has much to do yet in her task of rebuilding before the dream of reunion can begin to be realized; she will not get very far on the way unless she

succeeds in re-establishing firmly in her midst not only the "religious" life in the technical sense, but a belief that some element at least of mystical experience and practice should be the lot of every lover of God. Most of us do not acquiesce in behaving as if our human friends should be, and naturally are, always beyond our reach and touch; why, then, should we regard the unitive way in religion as kept for a few peculiar souls?

But, as Father Richard Benson hinted, the study of mysticism, so popular now, is of little avail, perhaps of worse than none, if it stop at a critical, scientific attitude. "Love is a life," wrote Richard Rolle in *The Form of Perfect Living*, "joining together the loving and the loved. . . . Love makes us one with God, love is the beauty of all virtues. Love is the thing through which God loves us, and we Him, and each of us loves others. Love is the desire of the heart, aye thinking on that it loves; and when it has that it loves, then it joys, and nothing can make it sorry."

"Aye thinking on that it loves!" *Ubi thesaurus, ibi cor.* Study is by itself of no avail.

The utmost any book can do is to show that some men have pursued the mystical goal to the last ultimate stretch of their powers, and to suggest that what they have done we might all do, if we only started forth on the path they followed to the end.

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